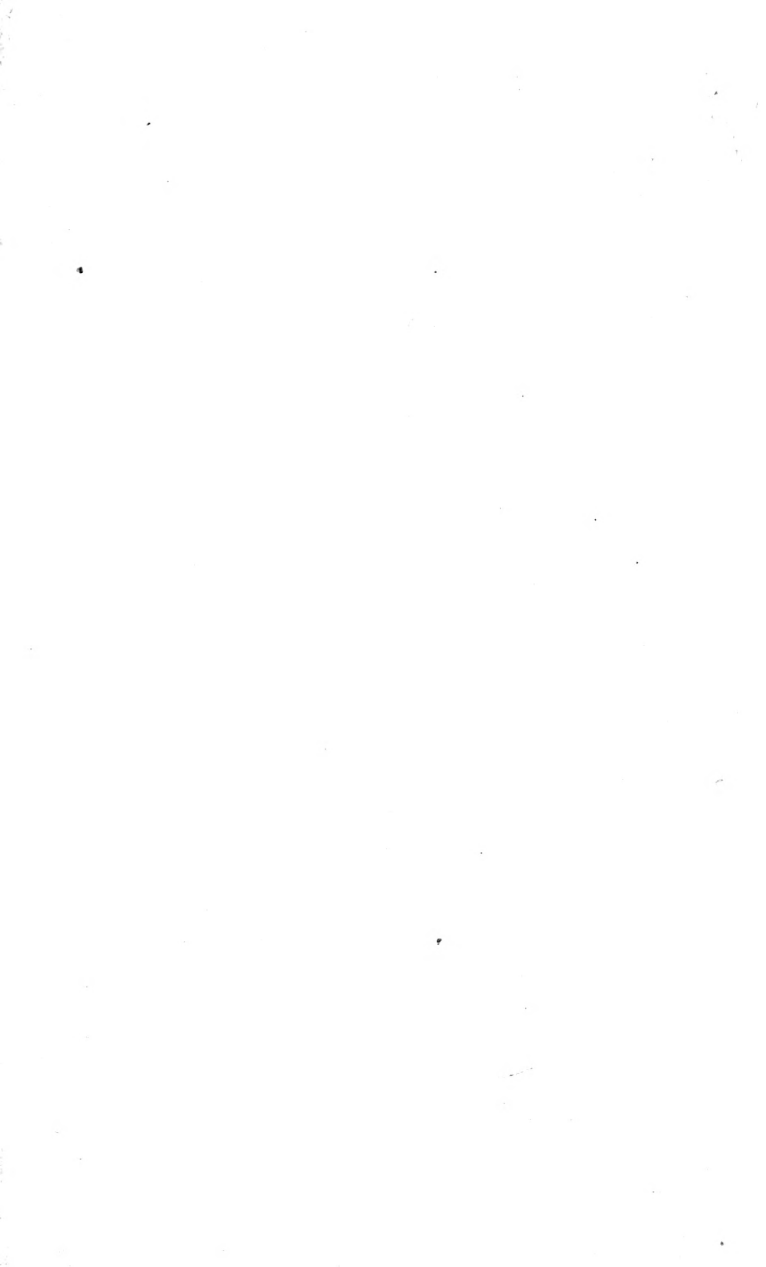






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JESSIE TRIM.

VOL. II.



# JESSIE TRIM.

A Novel.

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF "BLADE-O'-GRASS," "GOLDEN GRAIN," "BREAD-AND-CHEESE AND  
KISSES," "GRIF," "LONDON'S HEART," AND "JOSHUA MARVEL."

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VOL. II.

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LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1874.

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CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,

CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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# JESSIE TRIM.

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## CHAPTER I.

8 STRANGE REVELATIONS IN UNCLE BRYAN'S LIFE.

“So, without a friend in the world, I wandered still further away from the town in which I was born. I tarried here and tarried there, and found no rest for the sole of my foot until I reached a city where, before my means were exhausted, I obtained employment in the office of an accountant. It was by the merest chance that I obtained the situation, for there were many applicants; but I was quick at figures, and that quality served me. The position was not a distinguished one; I was not destined to occupy it long, however, for being coldly interested in my work—simply

because it enabled me to live—I performed the tasks set for me to do, not only expeditiously, but with the exactitude of a machine. This was precisely what was required of me, and I rose into favour with my employer. Some of the clients who came to us for advice in their difficulties were afflicted with a kind of moral disease, which for their credit's sake it was necessary should not be exposed to the world. It was not the business of our office to be nice as to our clients' honesty and integrity, and it did not trouble me to see rogues walking about in broadcloth. It was of a piece with the rest. Many delicate matters of figures were intrusted to me; my lonely habits, my reserved manner, and the circumstance of my having no connections or friends, were high recommendations, and I heard my employer say, more than once, to his clients, 'Mr. Carey is as secret as the grave; you may confide anything to him.' No wonder, therefore, that in the course of years I became manager of the business. I began to save money,

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simply because I was earning more than I required for my necessities. I had no extravagances, I never went into society, and I did not see that any pleasure was to be derived from following the ordinary pursuits of men of my own age. I set down a rigid course of life for myself, and I spent my leisure in solitude; walked and read and lived entirely in myself. One fancy alone I indulged in; I loved flowers, and I made them my companions. An occupation of some kind for my leisure was forced upon me, I suppose, by natural necessity; the mind, if its balance is to be maintained, must have something to feed upon, and I tended my flowers and watched them through their various stages with much interest; I had, and have, a real affection for them. Every year that passed fixed my habits more firmly, and I had no desire to change them. Apart from my mute and beautiful friends, life was tasteless for me; there was no sweetness in it that I could see. It consisted of dull plodding day after day, of

growing older day after day. I reflected upon it with scornful curiosity, and made myself, as it were, a text for speculative commentary. I knew what would be the end of it: in the natural order of things I should live until I grew old, when, in the natural order of things, I should die and pass away, fading into absolute nothingness—that was all. It seemed to me a poor affair, so far as it was presented to me in the different aspects with which I had been made familiar. I often thought of the poor girl who had been the only friend I ever had in the world, and in that remembrance was comprised all the tenderness I had ever felt towards my species.

“I hope I do not distress you by my words; but it has come upon me in some odd way to give you as exact a portrait of myself, as I was at that time, as I can produce; perhaps for the reason that I wish you to understand the change that took place in me not long afterwards. Years ago I buried as in a grave all the records of my life, with

the intention of never speaking of them, of never thinking of them if I could help it. But man proposes, chance disposes. Even to-night I intended to pluck out only one remembrance, but I have been overpowered.

“When I was thirty years of age I was taken into partnership, and five years afterwards my partner died, and I was sole master. Before I was taken into partnership I had been a machine, paid to perform certain duties; but when I was a partner I considered myself responsible for the nature of the business we undertook, and I purified the office, sending all clients away who came with a dishonest intent. This change resulted, strangely enough, to my advantage, and the business increased. I conducted it steadily, without in any respect changing my mode of life. The money I was making was in every way valueless to me. I had no one to whom I cared to leave it, and no pet scheme which I wished to be carried out after my death. I remember thinking that it would be a fine thing to fling the money into the sea before I died.

“I come now to the most eventful page in the history of my life. If I could blot out the record, and could stamp it into oblivion, I would gladly do so; but it is out of my power, and I can only look upon it with wonder, and upon myself with contempt for the part I played in it.

“It was a cold day in November, and a miserable sleet was falling. I was sitting alone in my private office, looking over some papers, when my clerk announced a Mr. Richard Glaive, who had written that he wished to consult me upon his affairs. He entered—a tall sleek man, well fed, well dressed, about fifty years of age—a man, I judged, who had seen but little of the world’s troubles. But there was trouble in his face on the occasion of my first introduction to him. With the air of one who was suffering from a deep injustice, he explained to me the nature of his perplexities. I learnt that he was, as I had supposed, a man who had never worked, who had never done anything useful, and who had lived all his life upon a

moderate income which he had inherited. Wishing to increase his income, for the purpose, as I understood, of being able the better to enjoy life—‘surely an innocent and laudable desire,’ he said—he had been tempted to take a large number of shares in a company which had been established with a great flourish of promises—had been tempted to become a director for the sake of the fees; ‘nothing to do, my dear sir,’ he explained to me, ‘and so much a year for it; the very thing to suit a gentleman.’ His money hitherto had yielded five per cent., invested in safe securities; the new company promised from twenty to thirty. The temptation was too great to be resisted, and, blinded by his cupidity, he had walked into the pit. As was to be expected, the company was a bubble, the crash came, and the gulls were swooped upon by the creditors. Lawyers’ letters were pouring in upon him, and actions were about to be taken against him. There were other complications, also, in the shape of long-standing debts, upon which he had been

paying interest, but a full settlement of which was now demanded. There was a manifest sense of injury in his tone as he spoke of these debts—‘youthful follies,’ he called them; adding immediately, with an easy smile, ‘youth must have its fling;’ conveying the idea that he did not consider himself responsible for them, for the reason that they had been so long standing. Altogether the case was a common one enough, and when he had concluded the catalogue of his embarrassments, I said that the first thing to be done was to prepare a statement of his affairs from his papers, so that he might really see how he stood with the world. He thanked me effusively, as though I had suggested something which would not have occurred to an ordinary mind, and said that he had been advised to consult me, as I should most certainly be able to steer him safely through his difficulties. I replied that I would do the best I could, and on the following day he brought to the office a mass of papers, letters, and accounts. He had re-



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ceived other threatening letters since our first interview, and he was in a fever of perplexity. 'I depend entirely upon you, my dear sir,' he said. I suggested that I should write to his creditors to the effect that he had placed his affairs in my hands, and that in a short time he would be able to make a proposal to them, asking them to be patient in the meanwhile. He assented, saying, in words which sounded queerly in my ears, that all he wanted was to be relieved of his liabilities, and to be allowed to go on enjoying life in his old way; and before he left he asked me not to intrust the business to the hands of my clerks, but to undertake it personally myself. I promised that I would do so, and in a week I had the statement prepared—a statement which showed his affairs to be in the worst possible condition. He was insolvent to the extent of not being able to pay one quarter of what he owed. I was surprised at this result, for I had expected something very different from his explanations. On the

morning of the day on which it had been arranged that Mr. Glaive should call, I received a note from him, saying that he was very unwell, and that he would regard it as a favour if I would come to his house and explain matters to him. In the ordinary course of business I should have sent a clerk with the statement; but I could not do so in this instance, as it was necessary I should tell him what course he had best pursue. At seven o'clock in the evening I was at his house, a pretty little villa in the suburbs, embedded in a garden. I was shown at once into what Mr. Glaive called his study, where he sat expecting me. He glanced carelessly down the columns of figures in the statement.

“‘I don't understand figures,’ he said; ‘will you please explain them to me?’

“I commenced an explanation of the statement, line by line, when he interrupted me, saying,

“‘Pray forgive me, but I can't keep these details in my head. Tell me the result.’

“I told him in one word—ruin. Hitherto his manner had been so indifferent that one might have supposed we were speaking of business which did not concern him, but on mention of the word ‘ruin,’ a deathly paleness came into his face. Before he had time to speak the door opened, and a young man entered the room with the air of one who was privileged in the house.

“‘Uncle,’ he said, ‘Fanny told me——’

“‘Don’t you see that I’m engaged, Ralph?’ cried Mr. Glaive. ‘I can’t be disturbed. Go and wish Fanny good-night.’

“The young man muttered a word or two of laughing apology, and retired. I saw him no more on that night, but, in the brief glance I cast at him, I saw that he was singularly handsome.

“‘Now tell me,’ said Mr. Glaive, breathing quickly, ‘what is your meaning?’

“‘My meaning is clear enough,’ I answered. ‘If these claims against you are pressed—and they will be—your entire property will not be sufficient to pay one-fourth of them.’

“‘But why should the claims be pressed?’ he asked, with a helpless look.

“‘I almost laughed in his face.

“‘You owe the money,’ I said; ‘that should be a sufficient explanation.’

“‘Do you mean to tell me,’ he asked, ‘that they would turn me out of house and home?’ And he looked around his comfortably-furnished room.

“‘It is more than probable,’ I replied. ‘I know the lawyers with whom you have to deal. This house is your own freehold, and its value is included in the statement.’

“‘He clasped his hands despairingly; I was silent, despising his weakness.

“‘Can’t you advise me?’ he cried. ‘If ruin came to you, what would you do?’

“‘Bear it,’ I replied. I was growing weary of him.

“‘Have you any children?’ he asked.

“‘No,’ I replied.

“‘Nor wife, perhaps?’ he continued.

“‘Nor wife, nor child, nor friend,’ I said, rising.

“ ‘What are you going to do?’ he cried. ‘For God’s sake, don’t leave me! You have undertaken the conduct of my affairs, and you will surely not desert me, when your services are most needed?’ ”

“ The observation was a just one, and I resumed my seat. I should not have attempted to leave so abruptly had it not been that his manner of addressing me had irritated me. He had spoken to me as though our positions were not equal, almost as though I were a dependent, and it was because of this that I had answered him roughly. His manner was now changed; it became almost servile. He implored me to suggest a plan by which he could be released from his liabilities, and he revealed sufficient of his true nature to convince me that he would have shrunk from no meanness to accomplish his desire. Perhaps, however, I do him injustice; perhaps I should rather say that he convinced me he had no sense of moral responsibility in the matter. I resolved to come to the point at once, and I told him that

I saw absolutely no way but one in which he could free himself from his liabilities, and that even that way, supposing his creditors were hard, would be difficult and harassing. It was by offering to give up the whole of his property on the condition of obtaining a clear release.

“‘But then I shall be beggared,’ he exclaimed, pressing his hand to his heart. ‘It is cruel—merciless!’

“‘It is just,’ I said sternly. ‘Your creditors have more right to complain than you. There is another plan, certainly, by which you might be enabled to keep possession of your house.’

“He asked me eagerly what it was, and I said that if he had a friend who would come forward and advance the necessary sum, his creditors would almost certainly accept it; but he informed me that he had no such friend, and that he and his daughter were alone in the world. Upon mention of his daughter, as if he had conjured her up, she entered the room. I do not know how to describe the effect of her appearance upon

me. It was like the breaking of the sun upon one who had lived in the dark all his life. Mr. Glaive, clutching my arm, drew me close to him, and whispered to me that *that* was the reason he could not contemplate the ruin before him with a calm mind."

(Uncle Bryan paused. Hitherto he had spoken in a cold and measured tone; when he resumed his story his voice was no longer passionless, and he did not seek to hold it in restraint.)

"As Mr. Glaive introduced me to his daughter I rose to go, and bowing to her and saying that I would see him again, was about to take my departure, when Miss Glaive said she hoped she had not frightened me away. Not her words, nor the effect of her appearance upon me, but her voice, arrested my steps; it was so exactly like the voice of the poor girl of whose last agony I had been the only witness, that I turned and looked steadily at her. There was no resemblance between them—my lost friend was dark, Miss Glaive was fair.

“You look at me,” said Miss Glaive, “as if you knew me.”

I managed to say that her voice reminded me of a dear friend.

“Dear!” Miss Glaive exclaimed archly; “very dear?”

“Very dear,” I said gravely.

“A lady friend?” she asked, with smiles.

“She of whom I speak,” I said, “was a woman.”

“Was!” echoed Miss Glaive.

“She is dead,” I explained.

“I am sorry,” said Miss Glaive very gently; “I beg your pardon.”

I was strangely stirred by her sympathising words. There was a little pause, and I moved again towards the door, not wishing to leave, but finding no cause to stay. Again her voice arrested me.

“If you go now,” she said, “I shall be quite sure that I *have* frightened you away. Papa declares that no one makes tea like me; I tell him he knows nothing about it. Do you drink tea, Mr. Carey? You shall be the judge.”



“And after tea,” added Mr. Glaive with an observant look at me—he had grown calmer while his daughter and I were speaking—“Fanny will give us some music.”

Miss Glaive did not ask for my verdict upon her tea-making, and soon sat down to the piano and played. In this quiet way an hour must have passed without a word being spoken. It was a new experience to me, and it took me out of myself as it were. The peaceful room, the presence of this graceful girl, and the sweet melodies she played, softly and dreamily, seemed to me to belong to another and a better world than that in which I was accustomed to move. It was strangely unreal and strangely beautiful. The music ceased, and Miss Glaive came to my side.

“Papa is asleep,” she whispered; “we must be very quiet now.”

There were books on the table, and I turned the leaves of one without any consciousness of what I was gazing upon. It did not occur to me that this was the

proper time for me to leave ; I was as a man enthralled. A movement made by the sleeping man (did he sleep ? I have sometimes wondered in my jealous analysis of these small details) aroused me from my dream, and I wished Miss Glaive good-night. She accompanied me to the street-door.

“ ‘ Papa is in trouble,’ she said, ‘ are you going to assist him ? ’

“ ‘ He has asked for my advice,’ I replied.

“ ‘ We must not talk now,’ she said, ‘ for fear he should awake and miss me ; he is irritable, and has heart-disease. May I call and see you to-morrow ? I know where your office is. I wrote the notes you received from papa.’

“ ‘ I shall be glad to see you,’ I said.

“ ‘ At three o’clock, then,’ were her last words, and we shook hands and parted.

“ A heavy rain had set in during my visit, but I was scarcely conscious of it as I walked into the town. Late as it was, I went to my office. For what purpose do you think ? To get the notes which I had

received from Mr. Glaive—the notes which now were precious to me because she had written them. I took them home with me and read them, and studied the delicate writing with senseless infatuation, and then placed them under my pillow for a charm, as a schoolgirl might have done. At the office the next morning I made another and a closer examination of Mr. Glaive's affairs, with the same result as I had previously obtained. Ruin was before him—before her. Punctually at three o'clock Miss Glaive arrived. I met her at the door, and conducted her to my private room. My impressions of the previous night were deepened by her appearance; she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen, and her charm of manner was perfect. It would be useless for me to attempt to describe the feelings with which she inspired me; I have often endeavoured to account for them and understand them, and have never succeeded.

“‘Papa is very ill to-day,’ she said; ‘the doctor has been to see him, and says that he

is suffering from mental disorder, which may prove dangerous. I have come to you to ask you the nature of his 'trouble.'

" 'Do you not think,' I asked, 'that he would be angry if he knew I had made any disclosures of his private affairs?'"

" 'But he need not know,' she replied; 'I shall not tell him. Let it be a confidence between us. I saw some papers which you brought last night, but I do not understand them any more than papa does.'

" I could not resist her pleading, and I told her, awkwardly and hesitatingly, what I had told her father.

" 'And all this trouble is about money,' she said with smiles; 'I was afraid it was something worse.'

" I told her that it could not well be worse, unless she knew where money was to be obtained. She answered that she did not know, but that she supposed it would be got somewhere.

" 'You don't understand these matters of business,' I said; 'it is perhaps better for you.'

“‘That can’t be,’ she exclaimed; ‘if I knew anything of business I should know where to get the money from, and I would get it. That is what business men are for, is it not?’

“Charmed as I was by her simplicity—a simplicity which was utterly new to me, and which it was delightful to hear from her lips—I deemed it my duty to explain matters clearly to her. Steeling my heart, I did so in plain terms, and showed her the position in which her father would be placed within a very few days.

“‘You frighten me!’ she cried, as my words forced conviction upon her; and overcome by the news or by my manner of telling it, she fainted. If she had been fair before, how much fairer was she now as she lay before me? Her childlike ways, her beauty, her helplessness, made a slave of me. I feared at first that I had killed her, and I reproached myself bitterly. Timidly I bathed her forehead with water, and when she opened her eyes, and looked at me in innocent

wonder, a feeling that might have been heaven-born—to use a phrase—so fraught was it with thankful happiness, took possession of me. I explained to her what had occurred, and she lowered her veil to hide her tears. As I witnessed her grief, it seemed to me as if I were the cause of her father's misfortunes.

“ ‘And there is absolutely no hope for us?’ she sobbed.

“ ‘There is only the hope,’ I replied, ‘as I explained to your father, that some friend will come forward and serve him in this strait.’

“ ‘Papa has no such friend that I know of,’ she said.

“ ‘I thought of the young man whom I had seen at Mr. Glaive’s house on the previous night, and I mentioned him.

“ ‘ ‘Ralph,’ she said, ‘my cousin. No, he is very poor.’ She turned to me. ‘I had a fancy last night that you were our friend.’

“ ‘I answered in a constrained voice: ‘I never saw Mr. Glaive until a fortnight ago;

he called upon me only in the way of business.'

" 'Forgive me,' she murmured; 'I was wrong to come, perhaps—but I did not know.'

" 'If I could serve you—' I said, and paused. The words came to my lips and were uttered almost without the exercise of my will; not that I repented of them. She threw up her veil, and moved towards me.

" '*If!*' she echoed. 'You could if you pleased, could you not? *You* are rich?'

" 'I am not a poor man,' I said.

" 'Help us,' she pleaded, holding out her hands to me. 'Be my friend!'

" I murmured something—I did not know what—and she clasped my hand; the warm pressure of her fingers upon mine thrilled my pulses. The next minute I was alone. I strove to concentrate my thoughts upon certain matters of business which claimed my attention, but I found it impossible to do so. I could not dispossess myself of the image of Frances Glaive. In an idle humour

I wrote her name, Frances Glaive, over and over again; if I had been a boy, with all a boy's enthusiasm, instead of a man hardened and embittered by cruel experience, I could not have behaved more in accordance with established precedent. I saw Frances Glaive sitting in the vacant chair at my table; I heard her sweet voice; I gazed upon her face as it lay, insensible and beautiful, before me. 'Be my friend,' she had said. I could serve her; it was in my power to make her happy. I took out my bank-book and the private ledger in which I kept the record of my worldly progress; I was rich enough to pay all Mr. Glaive's liabilities, and still have a considerable sum left; but I need not pay them in full. I knew that I could easily settle with his creditors for a trifle over the value of his estate. I did not value money, and yet I decided upon nothing; I could not think calmly upon the matter; I thought only of Frances Glaive, knowing full well that she, by a word, by a look, by a smile, could make me do any wild or extravagant



thing against all reason and conviction. I craved to see her again, and so strong was this craving that in the evening I found myself walking in the direction of Mr. Glaive's house. I can recall the manner of that walk; I can recall how, governed by an impulse stronger than reason, I still was conscious of a curious mental conflict which was being waged within me, independent of my own will as it seemed, and the most powerful forces of which strove to pull me back, while I was really walking along without hesitation. I *did* hesitate when I stood before Mr. Glaive's house, but only for a very few moments. Frances Glaive came into the passage to receive me.

“‘I thought you would come,’ she said, her face lighting up.

“‘And you are glad?’ I could not help asking.

“‘Very, very glad. Papa is in the study; he is dreadfully weak and ill, and I have been counting the minutes. May I tell him that I have brought him a friend?’

“ ‘Yes,’ I answered ; ‘a friend of yours.’ ”

“ All this while she had not relinquished my hand ; and I too willingly retained hers in mine. Well, well—at that time I would have thought no price too heavy to pay for such precious moments.

“ I will not prolong my story more than I can help ; already it has far exceeded the limits I proposed to myself ; but when the floodgates are opened, the tide rushes in. You can guess what followed ; you can guess that I served Mr. Glaive for the sake of his daughter. In a short time he was a free man, and I was his only creditor. I grew to love Frances Glaive most passionately, and her father saw and encouraged my passion. My character underwent a wonderful change. Love transformed all things. Through Frances Glaive’s innocence and artlessness the world became purified ; through her beauty the world became beautiful to me. By simple contact with her nature all the bitterness in my nature was dissolved. The scales fell from my eyes, and I saw good

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even in things I had most despised. The days were brighter ; the nights were sweeter. Life was worth having. Say that a man who had been born blind, and who had no knowledge of the beauties of nature, is suddenly blessed with vision ; a new world is open to him, and he appreciates, with the most exquisite enjoyment and sensibility, the light and colour and graceful shapes by which for the first time he sees himself surrounded. The spring buds, the bright sunshine of summer, the russet tints of autumn, the pure snow with its myriad wonders, as it lies on the hills, as it floats in the air, as it fringes the bare branches—not alone these, but the tiniest insect, the smallest flower, are revelations to him. It was thus with me, and all the fresh feelings of youth came to me when I was a middle-aged man.”

## CHAPTER II.

### UNCLE BRYAN CONCLUDES HIS STORY.

“ I BECAME a frequent visitor at Mr. Glaive’s house. Three or four times a week I spent my evenings there, and I was always welcomed with smiles and good words. Mr. Glaive and his daughter had never mingled in the gaieties of the city ; neither had I. One night we were speaking of a concert that was to be given at the largest public hall in the city ; a royal prince had promised his patronage, and Frances Glaive was eager to see him.

“ ‘ I should like to go so much,’ she said ; ‘ I think I would give anything to go.’

“ ‘ I would take you with pleasure,’ said her father ; ‘ but there are two obstacles. One

is the expense—that could be got over, I daresay ; but the other is insurmountable. The excitement would be too much for my heart.’

“His heart was a favourite theme with him ; he was not to be troubled or irritated or excited because of it ; he was to be petted and humoured because of it. It enabled him to live the life he loved best—a life of perfect indolence.

“The next time I visited them, I presented Frances Glaive with tickets for the concert. It required courage on my part, for it was the first step in a new direction.

“‘What am I to do with them ?’ she asked. ‘You are very good, but I have no one to take me.’

“‘I was going to ask Mr. Glaive,’ I said, ‘if he would intrust you to my care.’

“Mr. Glaive replied in his heartiest manner, and his daughter was wild with delight. If anything had been needed to complete the spell, Frances Glaive’s appearance on that night would have supplied it. For beauty,

for grace, for freshness, there was not a lady in the hall who could compare with her. I experienced a new feeling of happiness as I witnessed the admiring glances of the assembly, and Frances Glaive herself was no less happy in the admiration she excited. From that night we drifted into the gaieties of the city, and I became her constant companion—necessarily, because I supplied the means. I must mention here that her cousin Ralph was also a constant visitor at the house; but although he was on terms of affectionate intimacy with Frances—which I set down, not without jealous feeling, to their cousinship and to their having been much together during their childhood—Mr. Glaive did not seem to care for his presence at that time. I heard Ralph say to Frances at one time, when she spoke of an entertainment to which we were going,

“‘I would take you if I had money.’

“‘Get rich, then,’ she replied, ‘like Mr. Carey; but you are too idle to work.’

“I believed this to be pretty near the

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truth, although he chose to put another construction upon his indolence by saying that it was his misfortune to have been born a gentleman. He was barely twenty-two years of age at the time, but he had learnt that fine lesson perfectly. I came upon them then, and Frances Glaive said that she had just told her cousin that he was too idle to work, and that he had pleaded as an excuse that he had been born a gentleman. How I loved her for her frankness and truthfulness! Ralph turned very red, and said that he would work if he could obtain anything suitable. A little while after this conversation, at the intercession of his cousin, I obtained a situation for him, but he did not keep it many weeks. He was altogether too fine for work. As I have said, I had a jealous feeling towards him with reference to Frances Glaive; his youth, his comeliness, his gayer manners made me uneasy sometimes, and my intense love often magnified this feeling until it became torture. Was not this pearl of womanhood too

precious for me to hope to win? On one side there was light; on the other, darkness. There was no medium. Without her love, it was blackest night; with her love, it was brightest day. I determined to know my fate, and soon; but before I had mustered sufficient courage to speak, Mr. Glaive anticipated me. My attentions to his daughter, he said, were becoming conspicuous; as her only protector—a poor and helpless one, he added, with his heart-complaint, which prevented his guarding her and watching over her as he should—he was naturally anxious as to her future. I took advantage of a pause to ask nervously if my attentions were displeasing to him. Not at all, he answered eagerly; but as a father he was bound to ask the precise meaning that was to be attached to them. If ever I had a child of my own, I should be able to understand his anxiety. He put his handkerchief to his eyes, and waited for me to speak. A thrill of unspeakable happiness set my pulses quivering with sweet music. A child of



my own—of hers! If such a solemn charge were given into my hands, how sacredly, how tenderly would I guard it! I replied to Mr. Glaive, that my attentions could have but one meaning, and that it was my dearest hope to make Frances Glaive my wife. Then ensued a business conversation as to my means, as to how he himself was to live, and other details. My answers must have satisfied him, for he told me that the day on which I became his son-in-law would be the happiest day in his life.

“‘Take an early opportunity,’ he said, ‘of seeing Frances, and speak for yourself.’”

“I would have spoken to her at once; but he told me that she was not at home, and that he had designed this interview while she was out lest we should be disturbed, or lest he had misunderstood the attention I had paid to her. I appreciated the delicacy of his design, and I waited until the following day. I was not destined to be disappointed; Frances Glaive accepted me for her husband. I scarcely dared to

ask her if she loved me, but when she placed her hand in mine, was it not sufficient? I bought the house which pleased her best, and left her to furnish it according to her taste. It delighted me to humour her in all her whims; nothing that she did, nothing that she said, could be wrong. I changed my mode of life to please her; I dressed to please her. What was right in her eyes was right in mine. There was no questioning on my part. I had found my teacher, and I was supremely satisfied to be led by her who had brought sunshine to my life. She furnished the house with exquisite taste; it cost three times the money I had anticipated, but she said,

“ ‘What does it matter? You are rich.’

“What *did* it matter? What consideration of money could influence me when I would have given her my heart’s blood had she asked for it?

“Well, we were married. On the wedding-day I gave Mr. Glaive a full release of what he owed me.

“‘My father-in-law must not be my creditor,’ I said.

“For a time I was very, very happy, and Frances herself seemed to be so. If indulgence in every whim, in every desire, can produce happiness, she must have been in possession of it, for I grudged her nothing. It was very sweet to be led, and I did not count the cost. Ralph, her cousin, lived almost entirely at our house. I found it difficult to enter thoroughly into my wife’s enjoyments, although I strove honestly to do so. She was fond of society, fond of dress, fond of being admired; if, now and then, a thought intruded itself that there was frivolousness in her fancies, I crushed it down. What right had I to judge? My life had been until now a life of misery, because of my belief in my own convictions, because I had judged everything by hard stern rules; and now, when happiness was in my possession, and I had discovered the folly and the error of my ways, I would not allow myself to relapse into my old beliefs. We were living

at a rate that outstripped my means, but it did not trouble me much. Money would make no difference in our feelings: if we grew poor, it would be a good test for our affection. I happened to mention casually to Mr. Glaive that we were living at a high rate.

“‘You surely do not mean to retrench!’ he exclaimed.

“‘I certainly have no such intention,’ I replied, smiling, ‘unless Frances wishes it. She knows my position, and I am entirely satisfied to be led by her.’

“‘Quite right,’ said my father-in-law, regarding me somewhat thoughtfully, I fancied; ‘women know best about these matters—though Frances, after all, is a mere girl, twenty years your junior at least, eh?’

“‘That is so,’ I said, angry with myself for feeling uneasy at the remark.

“‘Yes, yes,’ he continued; ‘it would break her heart to give up any of her little whims—she is like a child. The dear girl *must* enjoy life—now is her only time. By-and-by, when she becomes a mother, perhaps——’

“I turned from him; it was my dearest hope, but it was fated not to be gratified.

“‘I tell you what it is, Bryan,’ he said, ‘you do not make a proper use of your opportunities; were I in your position, I would treble my income.’

“‘By what means?’ I asked.

“‘By speculating, my dear Bryan; by speculating judiciously, as with your abilities you would be sure to do. Think of the additional pleasures you could offer my dear girl, and of the thousand ways in which you could add to her enjoyment of life.’

“Money had never presented itself to me in this light before; Mr. Glaive was right; it was a thing to be desired for what it would purchase. I took heed of his counsels, and became a speculator. The words he had spoken to me bore other fruit besides—bitter fruit, from the distress they caused me. I was twenty-five—not twenty—years older than Frances, and gray hairs were multiplying fast on my head. The thought that in a very few years my hair might be

quite white, while Frances would be still a girl, gave me unutterable pain ; but I strove to banish it from my mind. We had been married nearly six months, and with the exception of my own self-torturings, no cloud had appeared to darken our lives, when a circumstance occurred. As I was going home one evening, a woman stopped me—a poor ragged creature—and addressing me by name, begged me to assist her. During those few months I never paused to inquire into the merits of an appeal for charity—my own happiness pleaded for the applicants, and I gave without question. I gave this woman a shilling, and she accepted it thankfully enough, but with the mournful remark that it would be gone to-morrow. That, and the circumstance of her addressing me by name—I having no knowledge of her—interested me, and I questioned her. She was a stranger, she said, and had but newly arrived, having walked many weary miles. Where did she come from ? I asked ; and she mentioned the town where I had first tarried and suffered

after leaving my home. She told me that she saw my name over my place of business, and had recognised it as belonging to one who had been most kind to a young friend she knew years and years ago, and then she mentioned the name of the girl who had died in my arms.

“‘What were you?’ I asked. ‘I have no remembrance of you.’

“‘Don’t ask me what I was or what I am,’ she faltered; ‘but if you can assist me to lead an honest life, do so for pity’s sake.’

“In memory of the poor girl whom she had known, I determined to assist this unfortunate creature—at that time a middle-aged woman—and I obtained a respectable lodging for her at once. I told her that we would never refer to the past, but that she should commence a new and better life at once. And she did; and honestly fulfilled its duties.

“Everything seemed to be going on well and happily at home, and I was in the full enjoyment of my fool’s paradise, when I

received a shock which almost turned the current of my blood. It took place on a day when I had been occasioned much annoyance by the circumstance of my father-in-law drawing upon me, without my permission, for a sum of money which was of consequence to me. It was not the first time he had done this, and I had paid his drafts with but slight reluctance, for they were for small amounts. But the amount of the present bill was serious, and it came at an inconvenient time. I was so much annoyed that, knowing Mr. Glaive to be at my house spending the evening, I determined not to go home until late, for fear that angry words might pass between us in the presence of Frances. So I sent a note to my wife, saying that business detained me at the office ; and I idled away the time until ten o'clock, when I walked slowly home. My wife was not in the usual room in which we sat of an evening, and I went to a little room of which she was very fond, and which she called her sanctuary. I heard voices there, hers and her cousin



Ralph's, and the words that he was addressing to her arrested my steps. I was guilty then of the first mean action in my life—I listened. What I heard I cannot here repeat, but I heard enough to know that I had been cheated and cajoled. I did not wait for the end, but I stole away with a desolate heart. My dream was over, and I was awake again, with a desolate heart, and with all my old opinions and old convictions at work within me in stronger force than ever.

“I said nothing; certain as I was of the ugly bitter truth, I resolved to be still more certain of it, not from my own impressions, but from outward evidence. I discovered to my astonishment that my wife's vanity, her fondness for display, her love of the admiration of men, her frivolity, her flirtations with her cousin Ralph, and my own ridiculous infatuation and blindness were matters of common conversation. Fool that I was to believe in goodness! I cast aside all weakness, and resolved never to be deceived again.

My heart was like a withered leaf, and all the foolish tenderness of my nature died an unredeemable death. Towards one person, and one alone, did I entertain any feeling of kindness; that was the woman who had solicited my help, and who had known the poor lost girl-friend of my younger days. I was sick almost to death of my home; the sight of my wife's fair face was unutterably painful to me; I was sick of the place in which I had been worldly prosperous. I yearned to fly from it, and to find myself again among strangers. The events that brought about the accomplishment of this desire came quickly. Some of the speculations I had entered into turned out badly; I could have saved myself from loss had I exercised my usual forethought; but I was reckless and despairing, and it was almost with a feeling of joy that I found, upon a careful examination of my affairs, that I had barely enough to settle with my creditors. I called them together secretly, letting neither my wife nor Mr. Glaive know of my position. I

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enjoined secrecy upon those to whom I was indebted, and made over to them everything I possessed in the world. Upon that very day Mr. Glaive took me to task for my treatment of his daughter, for my neglect of her. I listened to him calmly, and told him I had good and sufficient reasons for my conduct. It was an angry interview, and I ended it abruptly upon his saying that his daughter's happiness would have been more assured if he had given her to one who was more suitable to her. That same night a meeting of another description took place between Ralph and myself. He was talking of his 'pretty cousin' in public, and of me in offensive terms. I have always regretted that I took notice of him on that occasion, for he was in liquor; but I was not master of myself. I left him after hot words had passed between us, and went to my office. He sought me there, and continued the quarrel, and boasted to my face that my wife loved him, and would have married him but for my stepping between them.

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“‘You fool,’ he said scornfully ; ‘you bought her !’

“It was a bitter truth. Had I been a poor man, Frances Glaive would never have become my wife. But when he said that it was a bargain between me and her father, I thrust him from the office, and shut the door in his face. Everything was clear now, and I looked with shame and mortification upon my childish folly ; but I was justly punished for it. I made my arrangements for departure, for I resolved never to live with my wife again, never even to see her, for fear that her fair false face should turn my senses again. The news of my failure must soon become known, and I did not intend to remain a day after its announcement. I wrote a letter to my wife, telling her that I had discovered all, and that I could no longer live with her. I told her that I was ruined, and that I was going to London to bury myself in a locality where there was the least possibility of my becoming known, and that it was useless her seeking me or sending to me, after the shame

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and disgrace she had brought upon me. 'If,' I concluded, 'I could make you a free woman, so that you might marry the man you love, I would willingly lay down my life ; but it cannot be done. The only and best reparation I can offer is to promise, as I do most faithfully, to wipe you out of my heart, so that you may be free from me for ever.' I had some small store of money by me, half of which I enclosed in the letter. I knew that she was in no fear of want, and that she would find a home if she needed it in her father's house. Before I left the town I went to see the woman I had befriended, and to bid her farewell ; she was earning her living by needlework. I gave her some of the money I had left, and I might have been tempted to believe, if I could have believed in anything good, that she at least was grateful to me for the assistance I had rendered her. When I came out of the house in which she lived, I saw Mr. Glaive and Ralph, arm-in-arm, on the opposite side of the way. I avoided them, and the next

morning I shook the dust from my feet, and started for London. I never saw them again. I came to this part of London, where there was the least chance of my being discovered; shortly afterwards I learnt that this business was for sale, and I found I had just sufficient money to purchase it. You know now, thus far, the leading incidents of my life, and that its crowning sorrow and bitterness arose from my senseless worship of a vain, frivolous, and beautiful woman. I have only a few words to add, and they refer to Jessie.

I had no knowledge whatever of her, but on the first night of her arrival something in her face, something in her ways, reminded me of my wife. On the following morning she gave me a letter. It was from my wife, and was dated six years ago. How she discovered my address I cannot tell. It was to the effect that I should read it when she was dead, and it asked me simply to give a home to the friendless child who presented it. You can understand the effect it had upon me; questioning Jessie privately, I

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learned from her that she was indeed friendless and an orphan. I ascertained the place she came from, and was relieved to know that it was not the town in which I had been married. She had been stopping at an ordinary lodging-house, and I wrote to the address she gave me, but received no answer. In the meantime I feared that the quiet routine of the life I had led, and which suited me, was likely to be interrupted by the introduction into the house of another inmate. I resolved to take Jessie back to the friends she had been stopping with before she came here, and to arrange for her residence with them, undertaking to pay the expenses of her living, although, as you are aware, I could ill afford it. On the morning I took Jessie away, I gave her to understand that she would not return; but when I reached the place I found that her friends had left; I was told they had emigrated, and I made sure of the fact. It does not come within the scope of what I intended to relate to you to state why I was absent from home

longer than I anticipated, nor what consideration influenced me in bringing Jessie back with me. But it is pertinent to say that I see in her the same qualities, the same frivolities and vanities which I know existed in my wife, and which entailed upon me the most bitter sorrow it has ever fallen to the lot of man to suffer. She is here, however, for good or for ill; if it turn out for good, it will be due to but one influence.

“I have nothing more to add except to exact from you the condition that not one word of what I have said shall ever be told to Jessie.”



## CHAPTER III.

### I RECEIVE AN INVITATION.

THUS abruptly uncle Bryan concluded his story. Some parts of it had moved me very deeply with sympathy for him; but the latter part, where he spoke of Jessie in such a strangely unjust and inexplicable manner, filled me with indignation. I had no time, however, to think about it, for almost immediately on the conclusion of his story, Jessie came home, flushed and radiant, from her visit to the Wests. Our grave faces checked her exuberant spirits, and, looking from one to another, she sought for an explanation.

“Are you angry with me for going out?” she asked, divining that she was the cause of all this seriousness.

“No, my dear,” replied my mother; “no one is, I am sure. I hope you enjoyed yourself.”

“I always do,” said Jessie, her face clouding, “when I go to the Wests. Has anything disagreeable occurred?”

“No, Jessie, nothing.”

Jessie had a habit of shaking her head at herself when she was not satisfied with things; it was the slightest motion in the world, but there was much meaning in it. On the present occasion it expressed to me very plainly, “I know that you have been talking of me, and that I have done something wrong which I am not to be told of.” My mother understood it also, for with expressive tenderness she assisted Jessie to take off her bonnet and mantle, and smoothed Jessie’s hair in fond admiration. I could have embraced my mother for those marks of affection towards Jessie; they were an answer to uncle Bryan’s unjust words.

“I think,” said Jessie, looking into my mother’s face, “that *you* are fond of me.”

"My dear," responded my mother, kissing her, "I regard you almost as my daughter."

"I like to be loved," murmured Jessie, almost wistfully, with tender looks at my mother, and keeping close to her as if for shelter from unkindness.

"Which would you rather have, Jessie," I asked most suddenly, "love or money?"

Heaven only knows how the words came to my tongue! They certainly were not the result of deliberate thought. Perhaps it was because of some unconscious connection between the words Jessie had just spoken, and those which she had spoken to me a little time before: "Chris, I think I would do anything in the world for money." The words were often in my mind, or perhaps they were prompted by an episode in the story I had just heard. Uncle Bryan's keen eyes were turned upon Jessie immediately the question passed my lips, and his scrutiny did not escape Jessie's observation.

"Ask me again, Chris," she said, with a sudden colour in her cheeks.

"I said, 'Which would you rather have—love or money?'"

"How much money—a great deal?"

"Yes, a great deal."

"What a question to ask! What does uncle Bryan say to it?"

"Uncle Bryan is too old for such follies," he replied roughly.

"That is a crooked way of getting out of an argument," she said defiantly, as if, being provoked herself, she wished to provoke him. "Money is not a folly, and money can buy anything. So, Chris, I think I would rather have money; for then," she continued, with a disdainful laugh, "I could buy new dresses and new bonnets, and everything else in the world that's worth having."

I listened ruefully, hoping she did not mean what she said, for she spoke mockingly. My mother, seeing that the conversation was taking an unfortunate direction, turned it by speaking of the West family, and Jessie entertained us with lively descriptions of her friends, throwing at the

same time an air of mystery over them, which considerably enhanced my curiosity concerning them. Soon afterwards all in the house had retired to rest.

But I knew that my mother would come down for a few minutes' quiet chat, and that we should have something to say to each other about uncle Bryan's wonderful story. It was in every way wonderful to me. I had always imagined that he had led a quiet uneventful life, and suddenly he had become a hero; but I could not associate the uncle Bryan I knew with the man who had fallen in love with Frances Glaive, and so I told my mother as we sat together half an hour later in my quiet little bed-room.

"His life has been a life of great suffering," my mother said, "and we can never feel too kindly towards him. He has shown us his heart to-night; and yet, my dear, I think I understand him better than you do."

"I daresay, mother; that's because you *are* better than I am."

“No, no, my dear,” she replied. “Who can be better than my darling boy? It is because I have more experience of the world. Chris, my heart melted to him to-night more than it has ever done. I had a curious fancy once when he was speaking. I wished that he had been a boy like you instead of an old man, for I yearned to take him in my arms and comfort him.”

“But what person in the world,” I thought, “would she not wish to comfort if she knew that he needed it?” And I said aloud: “If he had had a mother like mine, it would have been different with him.” (Such words as these were the natural outcome of my affection for this dearest of women, and I did not know then, although I believe I have learnt since, how sweet they were to her.) “But, mother, I can’t think of him as you do, when I remember what he said about Jessie. And tell me—would you like me to look on things as uncle Bryan does?”

“God forbid, child!” she exclaimed warmly.

“It would take the sweetness out of your life; but I pray that you may never be tried as he has been. All that I want to impress upon you is to be tolerant to him and kind, because of his great trials and troubles. And now, my dear, I have something to tell you that you will be glad to hear. Jessie, before she went to sleep, asked me not to believe what she had said about money. ‘I couldn’t help saying it,’ she said; ‘but I would rather be loved than have all the money there is in the world.’ Jessie puzzles me sometimes, my darling; but I have seen nothing in her nature that is not good.”

And with these sweet words of comfort my mother left me to my rest.

The battle between Jessie and me with respect to the Wests still continued. Jessie, standing upon her dignity, as she had declared she would, did not ask me again to call for her when she visited them, and as her visits were growing more frequent, my sufferings were proportionately intensified.

I felt that I could not hold out much longer, and I was on the point of giving way and sacrificing my manliness, when the difficulty was resolved for me by the following note, which my mother placed in my hands with a smile :

“Miss West presents her compliments to Mr. Christopher Carey, and will be happy to see him at nine o’clock to-night.”

I was greatly delighted, and I congratulated myself upon my powers of endurance, thinking, naturally enough, that I had Jessie to thank for the invitation. In obedience to the summons, and feeling really very curious about the Wests—and most anxious also, I must confess, to be where Jessie was—I presented myself at the house at the hour named to the minute. There was no need to knock at the street door, for it was open. I tapped on the wall of the dark passage, and waited for an answer. There was a great deal of laughter below, and my soft tapping was not heard, so I advanced two or three steps, and knocked more loudly.



“Who’s there?” a voice cried, and the laughter ceased.

“It’s me,” I answered; and I was about to announce myself more explicitly, when my words were taken up mockingly.

“Oh, it’s Me, is it? Well, come downstairs, Mr. Me. Flora child, open the door. Take care! Mind your head?”

The warning came too late. I knocked my head smartly against a beam in the ceiling, and stumbling down the stairs, entered the kitchen—the door of which was opened, by Flora I presume, just in time to receive me—in a very undignified manner. Screams of laughter greeted me as I picked myself up, very hot and red at my loss of dignity.

“Be quiet, children!” cried the voice which I had first heard. “I hope you haven’t hurt yourself, Mr. Me! Come along and shake hands. Very glad to see you. ‘And Jack fell down and broke his crown.’—This quotation because I was rubbing my head, which I had bumped severely.

"I am not hurt much, thank you," I said, as I walked towards the speaker, who was either a girl or a woman, or both in one, for I could not guess her age within ten years. She was sitting on a bench before a table; and as I gave her my hand, she placed her fingers to her lips, and glanced expressively towards a curtain, made of two patchwork quilts, which partitioned off a part of the kitchen. There was something going on behind this curtain, for there was a shuffling of feet there, and I heard low voices.

"Don't speak loud," said my hostess, as I guessed her to be. "I'm Miss West. Jessie's behind there; you'll see her presently. Don't let her know you're here."

"Why, doesn't she know?" I exclaimed, in a maze of bewilderment.

"Bless your heart, no! I sent you the note without her knowing anything of it. I thought you'd be glad." As Miss West made this remark she gave me a sharp look.

"I *am* glad," I said.

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“I knew you would be. Rubbing your head again! Well, you *have* raised a bump! Shall I brown-paper-and-vinegar you?”

“No, thank you,” I said, laughing; and then I looked round in wonder upon the strange scene.

## CHAPTER IV.

### I AM INTRODUCED TO A THEATRICAL FAMILY.

I think if I had been suddenly plunged into Aladdin's cave, I should not have been more amazed. There I should have expected to see the rich treasures of gold and precious stones and the magic fruit growing on magic trees with which that cave is filled, but for the strange wonders by which I was here surrounded I was totally unprepared. These loomed upon me only gradually, for the two tallow candles which threw light upon the scene were but a dim illumination. The kitchen, which comprised nearly the whole of the basement, was irregularly shaped, and so large that the distant corners were almost completely in shade. Lurking, as it were, in

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one of these distant corners was a man strangely accoutred, whom I expected would presently step forward and join our party, but not a motion did the figure make. I subsequently discovered that it was a dummy man, in chain armour, which had once played a famous part (the armour, not the man) in a famous drama of the middle ages. Hanging upon the walls were numberless articles of male and female attire, some mentionable, some un-ditto; but with rare exceptions the dresses were not such as I was accustomed to rub against in my daily walks. These that I saw hanging around the room, covering every inch of available space from ceiling to floor, were theatrical dresses of different fashions and degrees; many were of silk and satin, very much faded, for persons of quality, and some were of commoner stuff for commoner folks — which latter, from their appearance, seemed to have worn better. Here the dress of a noble Roman fraternised with the kilt of a canny Scotchman, and here the satin cloak and trunks of a fashionable

melodramatic nobleman contemplated (doubtless with sinister designs) the modest bodice which covered the breast of female virtue. High life and low life, in every description of ancient, mediæval, and modern fashion, were here represented; and to an eye more practised and fanciful than mine, the room might have been supposed to be furnished with all the cardinal vices and virtues in allegory. Here were long boots whose character could not be mistaken—they represented villainy of the very deepest dye, and they frowned upon the heavy hobnails of a model peasantry. Here were the woollen garments and broad-buckled belt which had played their parts in a hundred smuggling adventures; and here the breeches, stockings, and natty shoes which had danced hundreds of jigs amidst uproarious applause. Here was a harlequin's dress ready to flash into life and play strange antics at the mere waving of the wand which hung above the mask; and clinging to it on either side, as if in fond memory of old triumphs, were the

short skirts of dainty columbines. Here was the dress of Wah-no-tee, feathers, bald scalp, mocassins, and hatchet, all complete, side by side with the fripperies of my Lord Foppington. Among the pots and pans on the dresser were polished breastplates and gauntlets and shields of various patterns. There were other dresses, very much be-spangled and be-jewelled, and pasteboard helmets and crowns of priceless value, and masks that had had a hard life of it, being dented here and bulged there and puffed up and bunged up in tender places, worse than any prizefighter's face after the severest encounter. A donkey's head and shoulders hung immediately above me, and by its side the plaster cast of a face without the slightest expression in it, and which is popularly supposed to represent an important branch of the histrionic art. Whichever way I turned, these and a hundred other strange articles most incongruously mixed together met my gaze.

“ Well, what do you think of us ? ” asked

Miss West. "We're a queer bunch, ain't we?"

"It's a strange place," I said, thinking it best to avoid personalities. "I never saw anything like it."

"We're a theatrical family, my dear," said Miss West, complacently, "born in the profession every one of us. Are you fond of theatres?"

As a matter of fact, I had only been twice to a theatre, but it was a place of enchantment to me, and I said as much to Miss West.

"Ah!" she mused. "It looks so from the front, I daresay; and a good job for us that it does. But it *is* bright, and it *does* carry you away!"

A familiar voice behind the curtain caused a diversion, and I turned eagerly in that direction. Miss West gave me another of her sharp looks.

"Don't you wish you had eyes in your ears?" she said. "You're one of the bashful ones, I can see. Could you play the



part of the Bashful Lover do you think?" (This question was accompanied by a significant dig in the ribs and a merry laugh.)

"I don't think," I stammered, very red and confused, "that I should ever be able to act."

"Not *that* part!" exclaimed my good-natured tormentor. "Well, then, you *could* play 'The Good-for-nothing.'"

Which was an allusion I did not at all understand. Miss West proceeded:

"All you've got to do, my dear, is to stick to nature. Turk gets mad with me when I tell him that. 'Stick to nature!' he cries. 'Why, then every fool could act.' I say to him, every fool *could* act if he stuck to nature. Then he rolls his eyes and glares, does Turk."

"Why does he do that?" I inquired.

"He plays the heavy villains, my dear, at the Royal Columbia Theatre; and what's a heavy villain without his glare? You should see him in 'The Will and the Way!' It's a sight."

"I should like to see him ; but you haven't told me who Turk is."

"Turk is my brother."

"He is not here ? " I asked, with another glance at the curtain.

"Oh, no ; he is playing a new part to-night. Poor Turk ! the new school of acting depresses him. Say, O."

"O," I said, with a smile.

"Ah, you should hear Turk say it ! It would fill a large page. Do you remember when you first learnt to write ?"

"Yes."

"And how, with your left arm sprawling over the table, and your left ear listening for something you never heard, and your eyes as staring wide open as ever they could be, and your tongue half out of your mouth, you dug your pen into the copy-book to produce your first O, which took about five minutes in the making, and then came out squabbled ? That's the way Gus says his O's. He takes a long time over them. Now Brinsley's different."

“Brinsley?”

“My brother. He’s sensible. He plays walking gentlemen in the new style, and rattles off what he has to say quite in the elegant way—as if he didn’t care a bit for it, you know. Turk sneers at him (dramatically, my dear), and says that the new school of acting is the ruin of the profession. But to come back to the ‘Bashful Lover.’ You shall play it, my dear. Gus shall write the piece.”

“Gus?”

“One of my brothers. Gus can write anything—tragedies, melo-dramas, farces—and he shall write ‘The Bashful Lover,’ after the style of ‘The Conjugal Lesson.’ One scene, and only two performers—you and Jessie. That would be nice, as Jessie says. You shall quarrel, of course, and make it up, and quarrel again, and snub each other, and sulk, and say spiteful things (Gus will see to all that), but—don’t look so glum!—it shall all come right in the end. You shall drop into each other’s arms and kiss, and while you are folding her to your heart (that’s

the style now-a-days, my dear), the curtain shall fall. We'll have a select audience—none of the boys, for that would spoil it, eh? but Gus—he must be present as the author. There'll be me, and Florry, and Matty, and Rosy, and Nelly, and Sophy, and we'll all appland at the right places, you may be sure.”

Miss West counted the names on her fingers as she went over them; the young ladies who bore them were all seated round the table and about the room, engaged in various ways. One was cutting-out stars of paper tinsel, and gluing them on to a gauze dress; another was making dancing shoes; another was amusing herself with a cardboard stage and cardboard characters, which she drew on and off by means of tin slides. Miss West, who also had an article of female attire, in an unfinished state, in her lap, which she worked upon in the intervals of her conversation, called these young ladies by name, one by one, and desired each to perform a magnificent curtsy to me, which

the little misses, the eldest of whom could not have been more than fourteen years of age, did in grand style, worthy of the finest ladies in the land. I was somewhat bewildered at the extent of Miss West's family, and I asked if there were any more of them.

"Heaps, my dear," she complacently replied; "there are nineteen of us altogether—eleven boys and eight girls, and all straight made, with the exception of me. I'm crooked. My legs are wrong. But I've been on the stage too. I played an old witch for an entire season, and got great applause. People in the house wondered how I could keep doubled up almost for such a long time together; I was on in one scene for twenty minutes; they didn't know I was doubled up naturally."

In proof of her words, Miss West rose, and hobbled to the end of the kitchen, as if in search of something, and hobbled back, the most genial and good-humoured of old witches. She was barely four feet in height,

and was a queer little figure indeed, but her face was bright and her eyes were bright; I could not help liking the little woman, and I told her so.

“That’s right, Master Christopher. We’ll be friends, you and me. Well, but to come back.” (This was evidently one of her favourite figures of speech.) “I got two pound five a week for playing the old witch; it lasted for twenty-two weeks, and it was almost the death of me. I had to do it though.”

“Why?”

Her voice grew quieter and she spoke in subdued tones, so that the little misses should not hear.

“Mother and father died within a month of each other, and there were the doctor’s bills and the funeral expenses to be provided for. Then there’s a large family of us, Master Christopher, and taking us altogether in a lump, we’re no joke. The boys wouldn’t hear of my going on the stage again, and I don’t see myself how I could do it regularly,

for there's a deal of business to look after indoors, letting alone the household affairs. Though I like it! If anybody—that is, anybody who's somebody—would write me a strong one-part piece, I could make a big hit with my figure. 'Tisn't every day you see such a figure as mine; it's worth a mint of money on the stage if it was properly worked. They're all on the stage but me; little Sophy there—she's the youngest, four years—spoke two lines in the pantomime last year to rounds of applause. The people love to see a clever child on the stage, though the papers write against it. But what are the papers? as Turk says, with a glare.”

“Of course,” I repeated, with a foolish air of wisdom, “what are the papers?”

“Turk says, if they were what they ought to be, somebody that he knows (that's himself, my dear) would be at the top of the tree.”

“Turk is very clever, then?”

“He's the best murderer to slow music that *I've* ever seen! But Gus is the genius

of the family. In the matter of that, we're all geniuses; but blighted, my dear, blighted!"

She gave me the merriest look, as little like a blighted being as can well be imagined.

"We're all of us very conceited, my dear, and very vain. What was that thing in the fable that tried to blow itself out, and came to grief?"

"The frog."

"We're all of us frogs, my dear. If people would only give us as much room as we think we ought to have, the world wouldn't be big enough for a quarter of us. And of all the conceited creatures in this topsyturvy world, actors and actresses are the worst. We're good enough in our way, but we *do* think such a deal of ourselves!"

"Is Mr. Gus a good actor?"

"Plays leading business; out of an engagement just now. He's behind the curtain with Jessie."

I was burning to ask what they were doing there, but the words hung on my tongue, and an inquiry of another description came



forth. It was concerning the wonderful collection of dresses and theatrical properties with which the kitchen was filled. I wanted to know if they were used solely for the adornment of the persons of the Wests.

“Bless your heart, my dear, no,” was the reply. “This is the stock-in-trade of our theatrical wardrobe business. We lend them out for private theatricals and bal masques. It was a good business once, but it has fallen off dreadfully. When bal masques were in fashion, mother used to lend as many as twenty and thirty dresses a night sometimes. If ever you want a dress for a bal masque—though there’s scarcely one a year now, worse luck!—come to me, and I’ll make you a nobleman, or a chimney sweep, or a brigand, or the Emperor of Russia, in the twinkling of a bedpost, and all for the small charge of—nothing, to you. But to come back. You wanted to ask just now what Gus and Jessie are doing behind that curtain. They’re rehearsing a scene, my dear, out of ‘As You Like It.’ Not that she wants teaching;

Jessie's a born actress, and if she were on the stage, she'd make a fortune with her face and voice. And as for her laugh—there, listen! I never *did* hear Mrs. Nesbit laugh—I'm not old enough to have seen her act, my dear—but if her laugh was as sweet and musical as Jessie's, I'll eat my stock-in-trade down to the last feather. And there's another reason, Master Christopher—Gus is in love with her. Bless my soul! how the boy changes colour! Why, they're all in love with her. Turk is mad about her, and Brinsley is pining away before our eyes. He doesn't mind it so much, because a slim figure suits his line of acting. It wouldn't do for a walking gentleman to be fat." Miss West placed her hand upon mine, and said, with sagacious nods, "My dear, if Jessie was on the stage, she would have ten thousand lovers. Hark! there's the bell. They're going to play the scene. Are you ready, Jessie?"

"Yes," cried Jessie, "but we want some one for Celia; she only speaks twice."

“Florry will do for Celia,” replied Miss West. “Go behind, Florry; we’ll commence the scene properly, and I’ll read Jacques. Now, then. Act four, scene one: The Forest of Arden. Up with the curtain.”

The curtain was drawn aside, and disclosed a roughly constructed stage, and absolutely an old scene representing a wood.

“We have three scenes,” whispered Miss West: “a chamber scene, a street scene, and a wood. You’ll see how beautifully Gus will play Orlando. He’ll be dressed for the part. Enter Rosalind, Celia, and Jacques. Look over the book with me. Florry knows her part. I commence: ‘I prithee, pretty youth——’”

I looked up, and saw Jessie and Florry on the stage. Jessie, looking towards us, did not appear to recognise me; her face was flushed, and her eyes were brilliant with excitement.

Miss West (as Jaques): “I prithee, pretty youth, let me be better acquainted with thee.”

Jessie (as Rosalind): "They say you are a very melancholy fellow."

Miss West: "I am so; I do love it better than laughing."

Jessie: "Those that are in extremity of either are abominable fellows, and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than drunkards."

Miss West: "Why, 'tis good to be sad and say nothing."

Jessie: "Why then, 'tis good to be a post!"

The raillery of the tone was perfect, and I was aglow with admiration. I had never in my life heard anything more exquisitely intoned, and this was but a foretaste of what was to follow.

Jessie (to Miss West): "A traveller! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad: I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's; then, to have seen much, and to have nothing, is to have rich eyes and poor hands."

Miss West: "Yes, I have gained my experience."

Jessie: "And your experience makes you sad: I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad; and to travel for it, too!"

Here Gus West entered, dressed as Orlando. Very noble and handsome he looked, and in the love scene that followed between him and Jessie, he played much too well for my peace of mind. When Jessie said, "Ask me what you will, I will grant it;" and he answered, "Then love me, Rosalind," he spoke in so natural a tone, and with so much eagerness, that I could not believe he was acting, especially with Miss West's words in my mind that he really was in love with her. I was heartily glad when the scene was at an end. But I was somewhat comforted by Jessie's unfeigned delight that I had at last found my way to the Wests.

"I thought at first that I had you to thank for being here," I said; "but Miss West sent me an invitation without you knowing anything of it, it seems."

"Miss West is a meddlesome—dear delight-

ful creature ! She's as good as gold ! And I'm a little bit glad that it has happened so ; it was manly in you not to give in, and I had a good mind to commence coaxing you again to come."

"And I was beginning to be so miserable," I said, adding my confession to hers, "at not being able to be where you were, that I was on the point of giving way myself, and asking you if I might come without an invitation."

"So the best thing you can do," cried Miss West, who had overheard us, "is to kiss and make friends."

Jessie laughed, and said, "I didn't see you while I was acting, Chris. I was so excited that I couldn't see a face in the room."

"Not even Orlando's ?" I suggested, with a furtive look at Jessie.

"Oh, yes ; his of course, but then we were acting to each other."

"Only acting, Jessie ?" I inquired, with much anxiety.

“Only acting, Jessie!” mimicked Miss West, whose sharp ears lost not a word. “Why, what else *should* it be? Or else she’s married to Gus—Scotch fashion, my dear. ‘I take thee, Rosalind (meaning Jessie), for wife,’ says Gus. ‘I do take thee, Orlando (meaning Gus), for my husband,’ says Jessie. But she’d say that to any man who played Orlando as well as Gus does—wouldn’t you, Jessie?”

“Of course I would,” replied Jessie, entering into her friend’s humour.

“Why, my dear, I knew a young lady who was married a dozen times a week (in two pieces every night) for more than six months. And her sweetheart was the stage carpenter, and saw it all from the wings—imagine his sufferings, my dear! Ah, but such marriages are often a good deal happier than real ones; there’s more fun in them, certainly. Jessie, there’s ten o’clock striking; it’s time for you to go. Now mind,” concluded Miss West, addressing me, “no more standing on ceremony; you’re welcome to

come and go when you like; we shall look on you as we look on Jessie, as one of the family."

I promised to come very often, and Miss West said I could not come too often. There was no mistaking the hearty sincerity of the invitation. Jessie and I walked very slowly home, and she listened delightedly to my praises of her acting.

"I don't want them at home to know about it, Chris," she said; "at least, not till I tell them."

"Very well, Jessie;" and we entered the little parlour together in a very happy mood.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE SUNDAY-NIGHT SUPPERS AT THE WESTS'.

IN due time I was introduced to other members of the West family, and grew so much attached to them, and so enamoured of their ways, that I spent nearly all my leisure in their company. Uncle Bryan seemed to resent this, growling that "new brooms swept clean," and asking me sarcastically if I intended to adopt the fashion through life of throwing over old friends for new ones. Jessie stepped in to defend me, and said boldly that uncle Bryan was not so fond of our society as to have reasonable cause to grumble at our absence.

"How do you know that?" asked uncle Bryan sharply. "You want people to be

like peacocks or jackdaws, always showing their feathers or chattering about themselves."

The cause of this little disturbance was that we often stayed at the Wests' until eleven or past eleven o'clock at night.

"Now that I have you to take care of me, Chris," said Jessie, "we need not be so particular."

"You had better live with your new friends altogether," observed uncle Bryan.

"I will, if you wish me to," replied Jessie indignantly; "I know that I'm a burden to you."

"No, no, my dear," interposed my mother; "uncle Bryan does not mean what he says."

And, indeed, uncle Bryan was silent, and retired from the contest. These little quarrels were always smoothed over by my mother, and Jessie herself not unfrequently played the penitent, and atoned indirectly to uncle Bryan for the sharp words she used. It is needless to say that I took sides with Jessie in the sometimes noisy, but more often quiet

warfare which existed between her and uncle Bryan. As I grew older I recognised the helplessness of her position in uncle Bryan's house, and I found bitter fault with him for his manner towards her. It was wanting not only in tenderness but in chivalry, and had it not been for the respect and consideration he showed for my mother, I have no doubt I should have quarrelled with him openly. As it was, I looked forward to the time when I should be able to offer my mother a home of my own, where she and Jessie and I could live together in harmony. With the Wests I became a great favourite. My talent as an artist contributed to this result, and I drew innumerable sketches of them in their various capacities. Miss West's Christian name was Josey (short for Josephine), and by that familiar title she insisted that I should address her. So it was Jessie, and Josey, and Turk, and Brinsley, and Chris, with us in a very short time, as though we had been on the most intimate terms for years. The walls of all the rooms in the

house, with the exception of the kitchen, were soon adorned with portraits and character sketches, with the artist's initials, C. C., in the corner. The portrait of Josey West, as the Witch of the Blasted Heath, as played by her, &c., &c.; the portrait of little Sophy West, as Celandine, in the "Fairy Dell," as played by her, &c., &c.; the portrait of Augustus West, as Claude Melnotte (I would not take him as Orlando), as played by him, &c., &c.; the portrait of Brinsley West, as Tom Shuffleton, as played by him, &c., &c.; the portrait of Turk West, as The Thug, as played by him, &c., &c.; and numberless others, were shown to admiring visitors, and contemplated by the admiring originals, to the glory of "the eminent young artist," as Miss West called me. In most of the superscriptions at the foot of the pictures the word "eminent" did good service. It was the eminent tragedian, the eminent comedian, the eminent character actor; and so on. Certainly the name of the West family was legion. Three of them

were married, and seemed from appearances to be emulative of the example of their parents in the matter of children. Sometimes on a Sunday evening the entire family would be assembled in the one house, and as the married folk brought their broods with them—the youngest three of which invariably were babies in arms—the total number of brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts was something alarming. The house was overrun with them.

“If we go on like this for a hundred years,” Miss West said to me, in confidence, “we shall become an Institution. Sheridan has seven already, and his wife is quite a young woman; J. H. has five, and Clarence four—and more coming, my dear!”

That was the chronic condition of the wives. There were always more coming. Sheridan, J. H., and Clarence were the eldest of Josey West’s brothers, and were well known to the British theatrical public in our quarter of London. At the commencement of our intimacy the constant introduction of members

of the family of whose existence I had been previously ignorant was very confusing to me, especially as Miss West, without preliminary explanation, spoke of all her relatives by their Christian names, and placed me on a footing of personal intimacy with them. I used to write lists of the names, with descriptions appended, and privately study them, so that I might not make mistakes in addressing them, but some of them were always in a tangle in my mind. The Sunday-night suppers were things to remember ; every available article of crockery in the house was pressed into service, and as even the youngest members of the family were accustomed to late hours and late suppers, the result may be imagined. Those for whom there was no room at the table had their supper on chairs, on stools, or on their laps as they sat on the ground. It was very rough and undignified, but it was delightfully enjoyable. The chatter, the laughter, the ringing voices of one and another trying to make themselves heard, the good humour, the free-handed and free-

hearted hospitality of those merry meetings, are present to me, as I recall the reminiscence. There was plenty to talk about, and plenty of words spoken that were worth listening to. A theatre in which one of the family was engaged was doing a bad business, and the actors were compelled to work on half salaries: one or two others were going on a provincial tour; another was out of an engagement; a manager had failed and the theatre was closed; and so on, and so on.

“There’s always something,” said Miss West. “Directly one saves a bit of money—it’s precious little one has the opportunity of saving—something happens that sucks it up. But, bless your heart! what else can be expected with such swarms of children as we’ve got in the family!”

“If a legitimate actor,” said Turk moodily, “could be certain of a regular engagement, it would be all right; but the public taste is vitiated! They want novelty; they’re not satisfied with legitimate business. Why,

if any one of us had happened to be born covered from head to foot with red pimples, with a green sprout sticking in the middle of each of them, he could command his fifty pound a week, while a man of sterling talent is compelled to vegetate on a paltry fifty bob !”

This sally was received with screams of laughter, and cries of “Bravo, Turk !”

“I’ve got an idea,” cried Josey West ; “why don’t we start a theatre ourselves, on the sharing principle ? Here we are, all ready-made : leading man, walking gentleman, low comedy, genteel comedy, new style of acting, old style of acting, old men and women, heavy villain” (a general laugh at Turk, who joined in it readily), “chambermaids, and ballet, all complete.”

“It’s all very well,” interposed Gus West, “but where’s the theatre ?”

“It’s all very well,” added Turk, “but where’s the capitalist ?”

“Advertise for one,” said Miss West. “‘Wanted, a capitalist with five thousand



pounds to undertake the management'” (tickle him with that, eh, Turk?)—“ ‘to undertake the management of a highly talented theatrical family, nearly forty in number (and more on the road), who can play tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce, ballet, burlesque, and pantomime in an unrivalled manner. They are furnished with well-stocked wardrobes, including wigs, and they will be happy to give private exhibition of their abilities, in proof of their competency. Included in their number is a dramatic author, who will be willing to supply new pieces, if desired, to suit the capacity of the company. As a proof that they are not pretenders, they have all been born in the profession’ (listen to that, Turk)—‘they have all been born in the profession. No objection to travel. In India and Australia they would astonish the natives, and would be sure to create an immense sensation. A certain fortune. Competition invited and defied.’ There! would that catch a capitalist?”

“And what should I do,” asked Jessie,

laughing, "if the capitalist were to come and carry you all away?"

"Come out with us as leading lady, to be sure," replied Josey West promptly; "and Chris can come as scene-painter, and there we are, all complete. Quite a happy family, my dear!"

We made very merry over the fancy, and extracted many amusing pictures from it. I was sorry when Josey West called to us that it was late, and time for us to go. It was a fine night, very quiet and very still, and Jessie and I lingered and talked of the Wests and their merry light-hearted ways.

"They have plenty of trouble, though," said Jessie; "all that glitters isn't gold."

"I have never seen any one happier than they are," I said. "Suppose they had all the money in the world, could they have spent a merrier evening?"

"What makes you mention money, Chris?"

"I don't know exactly, except that it came into my head to-night that if everybody had just a little more, everything would be

right. But then I suppose when they had just that little more, they would want just a little more."

"That is in uncle Bryan's style. Chris, I think you are clever!"

"I don't know, Jessie; Mr. Eden is pleased with me, and says I shall get along very well. I would like to; I would like to be rich."

She mimicked uncle Bryan: "You would like to be rich! You would like the moon! Open your mouth, and what you would like will drop into it."

I laughed at the imitation, which was perfect, and said, "Well, I suppose it is all nonsense—wishing, wishing! Uncle Bryan would be right if he said that, Jessie, and it's just what he *would* say, if he had the opportunity. Most of the great men I've read about had to work and wait for success. The other night, when uncle Bryan was in one of his amiable moods, he said that success was like the robber's cavern in 'The Forty Thieves,' and that there was one magic key which would always open it. When I

asked him what that key was, he said, Earnestness."

"That's one of the things that uncle Bryan would never give me credit for."

"Uncle Bryan is very unjust and very unkind. Let us turn back and walk a little. The night is so beautiful and I feel so happy at this minute that I should like it to last for ever." Jessie's hand stole into mine, and I held it close; the silence that followed was broken by Jessie.

"Why would you like to be rich, Chris?"

"For your sake, Jessie, more than for my own. If I could give you all that you desired, I shouldn't wish for anything more."

"You are very good to me, Chris. Why?"

"Because I love you, Jessie," I replied.

"Really and truly?" she exclaimed, half tenderly, half tantalisingly.

"With all my heart and soul," I said, in a low passionate tone.

"When one loves like that" (she was speaking seriously now), "what does it really mean?"

“I can only speak of myself, and I know that there is no sacrifice I would not make for you. I am sure there is nothing you could ask me to do that I would not do; if I could die to make you happy, I would do so gladly, Jessie.”

“But I don’t want you to die, Chris; what should I do without you? Then when one loves really and truly, and with one’s heart and soul, there is no selfishness in it? One doesn’t think of oneself?”

“I think of nothing but you, Jessie. I should like to be successful, for your sake; I should like to be rich, for your sake. Now do you understand?”

She did not reply, and when presently I ventured to look into her face, I saw that there were tears in her eyes.

“You are not angry with me, Jessie?”

“I should be an ungrateful girl indeed, if I were. No, Chris. I love to hear you speak to me as you have done. I was only thinking that I wished others were like you.”

“You mean uncle Bryan,” I said with a

quick apprehension of the direction of her thoughts. "But he takes pains to make people dislike him. Besides, he is at war with everything—he is, Jessie! He never goes to church; he never opens a Bible. I believe," I added, my voice sinking to a whisper, "that he is an Atheist." (And I said to myself mentally, as I gazed into Jessie's sweet face, "If he does not believe in God, it is less strange that he does not believe in you.")

I had given no thought to time, and now, when the church bells struck one o'clock, I was startled at the lateness of the hour. With a guilty look at each other, Jessie and I hurried home; before I could knock at the street-door, it was opened for us by my mother. She put her finger to her lips.

"I heard your steps, my dear," she said, with anxious tenderness; "hush, don't make a noise! You might wake your uncle."

"We had no idea of the time, mother," I said; "it isn't Jessie's fault. I kept her talking, and really thought it was no more

than eleven o'clock. I am so sorry we have kept you up! See what a lovely night it is."

We stood at the door for a little while, my mother in the centre, with her arms round our waists. When she kissed me and wished me good-night, I saw that she had been crying; but her pale face brightened as I put my arms about her neck, and held her to me for a few moments. When I released her, I found that we were alone; Jessie must have stepped up-stairs very quietly, for I did not hear her leave the room.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TURK, THE FIRST VILLAIN.

OF all the male members of the West family, Turk was the one I liked best. Our intimacy soon ripened into friendship, and he made me the confidant of his woes, and as I was a good listener we got on admirably together. It seemed that he had never had "a chance," as he termed it, and that he had been condemned by fate to act a line of business which he declared was distasteful to him—although I must confess that my after experience of him convinced me that it was exactly suited to him, and he to it—and in theatres where the intellectual discernment of the audiences was proverbially of a low standard.

"Perhaps you will tell me," he said to me,



in one of our private conferences, "what there is in my appearance that I should have been selected to play the first villain almost from my birth—from my birth, sir, Chris, my boy. Do I look like a murderer? Do I look like a man who had passed through a career of the deepest-dyed ruffianism, and was eager to go on with it? Speak your mind—it won't hurt me; I'm used to criticism, and I know what value to place upon it."

Turk was really a slight-made man, and as I had not seen him act at the time of these utterances I could not understand his sister's praises of him as the best murderer to slow music that she had ever seen. His appearance in private life was, to say the best of it, insignificant, and as utterly opposed to that of a deeply-dyed ruffian as can well be imagined. The only likeness to the description Josey West had given of him that I could see was his "glare," and he certainly did roll his eyes as he spoke, with an effect which was nothing less than tremendous. I mentioned to him that I had heard the

greatest praises of his acting, and that he played the villain's part to the life.

“And what does that prove?” he asked, with an oratorical flourish. “Does it prove that I am fit for nothing better, or that I am a conscientious actor? When I have a part to play, I play it; I don't play Turk West every night. See me play the Thug, and I defy you to recognise me; see me as the First Murderer in ‘Macbeth,’ and I defy you to recognise the Thug. When I first played the Thug, my own mother didn't know me; ‘That's something like acting,’ she said; and she ought to have known, rest her soul! for she played a baby in arms before she was out of long clothes, and spoke lines on the stage when she was three years old. Why, sir, my struggle with old Martin, in ‘The Will and the Way,’ was said to be the most realistic thing ever seen on the stage—and do I look as if I would murder a man? It was art, sir, pure art! I am a conscientious actor—a conscientious actor, sir, Chris, my boy—and what I have to play I

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play. Give me a strong leading part in a good piece, in a good theatre in the West-end—in the West-end, sir, Chris, my boy, not in this heaven-forsaken quarter—and then see what I can do! Why, sir, there are men occupying leading positions in our best theatres who can't hold a candle to Turk West—I'm not a vain man, and I say they can't hold a candle to Turk West! There are men—whose names I'll not mention, for I'm not envious and I only speak in the interests of art—men on the boards on the other side of Temple Bar—where *I've* never been seen—who are drawing large screws, and who have as much idea of acting as a barn-door fowl. What do they play? They play *themselves*, never mind what characters they represent. Dress doesn't make a character—it's the voice, and the manner, and the bearing. Why, look at——never mind; I said I wouldn't mention names. Directly he comes on the stage—whether he plays a young man or a middle-aged man or an old man, a man of this century or a man of the last century,

or farther back if you please—everybody says, ‘Ah, there’s old So-and-so!’ And he uses the same action and the same leer and the same walk, as if the hundreds of characters he has played in his time were written to represent *him*, not as if, having taken to the stage, it was his duty to represent *them*. Call that acting! It’s death and destruction to art, that’s what it is. And the public stand it—stand it, sir, Chris, my boy—being led by the nose, as asses are, by critics who have reasons of their own for not putting their thumbs down on such incompetency. That’s the word, sir, Chris, my boy, that’s the word—incompetency. But wait till I come out; wait till an author that I have in my eye—yes, sir, I have him; I know him, and he believes in me, and I believe in him; we fight a common cause—wait till he has finished the piece he is writing for me, a piece representing *two* passions; one is not enough for Turk West. When that piece is performed at one of the West-end theatres, with Turk West in the leading character, you may mark a new

era in the history of the stage. But mum, Chris, my boy, mum! Not a word of this to any of my relations."

My acquiescent rejoinders were very pleasing to him, and he expressed a high opinion of my judgment.

"You shall come and see me play to-morrow night," he said, "at the Royal Columbia. I'm engaged there for the heavy business. Can you get away from work at half-past five o'clock? I'll come for you if you like, and we'll walk together to the shop" (thus irreverently designating the Temple of Thespis).

I said I thought I could get away, and he promised to call for me.

"You will see, sir, Chris, my boy, the most villainous and incomprehensible blood-and-thunder melodrama that ever was presented on the stage. It is called 'The Knight of the Sable Plume, or the Blood-stained Banner.' Isn't the very title enough to drive intelligent persons from the doors? But sir, Chris, my boy, we play to a twopenny gallery, and the twopenny gallery

will have blood for its money, and plenty of it. 'The Blood-stained Banner' is a vile hash put together for a 'star'—an arrant impostor, sir—who plays the leading part. I'll say nothing of him—you shall see and judge for yourself. I play Plantagenet the Ruthless; I don't slur my part because it's impossible, absurd, and ridiculous—you'll find no shirking in Turk West; he knows what duty is, and he does it. If I have lines given me to speak in which there isn't an atom of sense, it isn't my fault; I speak them because I'm paid to speak them, and I do my best to illuminate—that's the word, sir, Chris, my boy—to illuminate a character which is an insult to my intelligence. Necessity knows no law, and if I'm compelled to knuckle-down to fate to-day, I live in hopes that the sun will shine to-morrow."

I said that I sincerely hoped the sun *would* shine to-morrow, and that it would shine brightly for him; and Turk West wrung my hand, and said that he wished the audiences he had to play to were as in-

• tellectually gifted as I was, adding that then there would be hope for the drama.

I obtained permission to leave on the following evening at the time mentioned by Turk, who was as good as his word in coming for me, and we walked together to the Royal Columbia Theatre.

“Prepare yourself, my boy,” he said, in the tone of one who was about to initiate a novice in solemn mysteries; “I am going to take you behind the scenes.”

I was duly impressed by the great privilege in store for me, and I walked by the side of Turk West, glorified in a measure by his importance. The theatre was not yet open, and a large number of persons was waiting for admittance, some of whom, as regular frequenters, recognised Turk and pointed him out to their companions, who regarded him with looks of awe and wonder; others, unaware of the great presence, were kicking vigorously at the doors. After lingering a little and looking about him with an unconscious air (really, I now believe, to

enjoy the small tribute of fame which was descending upon him ; but I did not suspect this at the time), Turk preceded me down an unobtrusive narrow passage, the existence of which could have been known only to the initiated. This led to the stage-door, which to my astonishment was the meanest, shabbiest, and most battered door within my experience. We plunged at once into the dark recesses of the theatre ; and after bumping my head very severely against jutting beams, and nearly breaking my neck by falling up and down unexpected steps, which were nothing more nor less than traps for the unwary, I found myself in a long barn-like room, full of draughts (which latter feature, indeed, seems to be the chronic complaint of all theatres, before and behind the curtain), and with a very low ceiling, which Turk informed me was the principal dressing-room for the gentlemen of the company. Therein were congregated seven or eight individuals, "making-up" for the first piece ; some were rubbing themselves dry with dirty



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towels, some were dressing, some undressing, some painting their faces. One, whom I afterwards discovered was the low-comedy man, was sticking pieces of pluffy wool upon his nose and cheeks, and dabbing them with rouge, with which he was also painting his eyebrows, so that they might match his close-cropped carroty-haired wig. Turk was familiarly and merrily greeted by all these brothers-in-arms, who all addressed him as "Cully;" and as he returned the compliment and "Cullied" them, I presumed it was a family name which they all enjoyed. Turk proceeded at once to disrobe himself, and I, filled with wonder at the mysteries of which I was, for the first time, a privileged observer, turned my attention to the other members of the company. The room adjoining was also occupied by the ladies of the company, who, judging from their voices, were in the merriest of spirits, and a smart rattle of jokes and saucy sayings passed from one room to another. Turk was evidently a favourite with the ladies, who called out "Turk, my dear," this, and

“Turk, my dear,” that, he returning their “dears” with “darlings,” as became a man of gallantry. When, after the lapse of a few minutes, I looked towards the place where Turk was, I discovered in his stead an imposing individual with a pair of magnificent moustaches on his lips, and such a development of calf to his legs as I certainly should never have given Turk credit for without ocular proof. I gazed at him in doubt as to whether it really was Turk I saw before me, and his voice presently convinced me that it was Turk, and no other. Over his herculean calves he drew a pair of doubtfully-white cotton tights, and over these a pair of yellow satin breeches, rather the worse for wear; around his waist (no longer “slim, but bulky, as became the “heavy man”) he drew a flaming red silk sash, with enormous fringes, and a broad black belt, in which were ominously displayed two great knives and three great pistols. Then came a ballet-shirt which had seen better days (or nights), then a blue velvet jacket, with slashed sleeves and

large brass buttons, and he completed his attire by throwing carelessly upon his head—which was framed in a wig of black ringlets—a peaked black hat, with a stained red feather drooping over (I feel that I ought to say “o’er”) his brow.

“This is the regulation kind of thing, Chris,” he said to me in a low voice—“this is the stuff that draws the twopenny gallery.”

And he turned, with much affability, and accepted a pewter-pot offered to him by a brother, with a “Here, Cully!” and drank a deep draught. Then he took me into the passage, and asked some person in authority to pass me into the theatre. The people were pouring in at all the entrances, and in a short time the house was completely filled. They were fully bent upon enjoying themselves, and began to kick and applaud directly they were seated. When the lights were turned up and a bright blaze broke upon the living sea of faces, there was a roar of delight; and as the musicians straggled into the orchestra, they were greeted with applause and

exclamations of familiarity, which fell upon ears supremely indifferent. I was placed in a good position, where I had a capital view of the stage, and having purchased a playbill, I began to study it. The programme was an imposing one, and the occupants of the two-penny gallery could certainly not complain that they did not have enough for their money. First, there was the romantic melodrama of "The Knight of the Sable Plume," in which that distinguished actor, Mr. Horace Saint Herbert Fitzherbert (pronounced by the entire press to be superior to the elder Kean, and to surpass Garrick), would sustain the principal character. To be followed by the thrilling drama of "The Lonely Murder at the Wayside Inn." After which, a comic song by Sam Jacobs, entitled "The Jolly Drunken Cobbler," and the clog hornpipe, by Mr. Dicksey. The whole to conclude with the stirring domestic drama of "The Trials and Vicissitudes of a Servant-Girl;" winding up with a grand allegorical tableau in coloured fires. The appetite that could have found

fault with the quantity must surely have been unappeasable.

In due time the music ceases, a bell rings, there is a moment's breathless expectation in the house, and the curtain rises on "The Knight of the Sable Plume." Scene the first : A wood. In the distance, the battlemented castle of Plantagenet the Ruthless. (So says the programme, but I cannot see the battle-mented castle, although I strain my eyes to discern it, being interested in it as the family residence of my friend Turk.) Enter two ruffians in leather jerkins and buff gloves. Times are very bad with them. They want gold, they want blood, and—ahr! they want revenge (with a redundancy of *r*'s). They roll their eyes, they gnash their teeth. Yonder is the castle of Plantagenet. There sits the lordly tyrant who grinds his vassals to the dust. Shall he be allowed to go on in his ruthless course unchecked? No! Hark! a thousand echoes reiterate the declaration. (I fancy the echoes.) No! no! no! They kneel, and swear revenge in dumb show. Who comes here? As

they live, it is the lovely Edith, the heiress to those baronial halls. The Fates are propitious. They'll tear her from the domestic hearth, and bear her senseless form to mountains wild. Exit ruffians elaborately. Enter Edith pensively. She is pretty, and she receives a round of applause from all parts of the house. She bows, and tells the audience that she has just dismounted from her snow-white palfrey outside. This accounts for her coming in without a hat, and with her hair hanging down her back over a white muslin frock. The sparkling foliage of the trees tempted her to stroll along the mossy sward. She sighs. Who is the stranger she met nine days ago upon this very spot? She did not speak to him, she did not see his face, but the beating of her heart, the clouds athwart the sky, the dew upon the grass, the whisper of the breeze, the beauteous birds that warble delicious notes to scented flowers, all, all whisper to her that she loves him. Ah, yes, she loves him! Could she but see once more his manly form, she'd die content. Cue to

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the musicians, with whose assistance Edith sings a plaintive song expressive of her wish To quit the sordid world, And with her love be whirled To other lands. On sorrow bent (she sings), I'd die content If *he* were by my side. Oh, take me, love, To realms above, And let me be thy bride. The ruffians enter at the back of the stage, and roam about with stealthy steps. They draw their knives, and breathe upon them. Expectation is in every eye. The ruffians advance. The high-born maiden continues her song. The ruffians retreat. The high-born concludes her song with a tra-la-la. The ruffians, having just made up their minds at that point, advance again, with a quick sliding movement. Seize her! "Oh, spare me, spare me!" she cries. "Spare you, daughter of Plantagenet the Ruthless! spare you! Never! Did thy gory sire spare my white-haired parent when, with his bloody sword, he clove him from head to foot, and laid him writhing in the dust? Spare you! Not if lightnings flashed and thunders rolled, not if all the powers of earth

and air interpose their forms protecting, shall you be spared! Revenge!" The music is worked up terrifically during the scene. The ruffians drag the maiden this way and that, evidently undecided as to which road they shall take to their mountains wild. They seem bent upon rending her lovely form into small pieces and running off the opposite sides of the stage with the fragments. "Help, oh, help me!" she cries. A sudden tumult is heard without. "Make way there, make way!" is heard, at least two yards from the spot. She shrieks more loudly. "I hear his lovèd step without!" she cries. And the next moment a figure clad in armour rushes in, and with one blow lays the two ruffians dead upon the stage. His visor is down, and towering in his helmet is a sable plume. It is he, the Knight of the Sable Plume! He supports Edith on one arm; he raises the other aloft to the skies, and the curtain drops upon the picture amidst the admiring plaudits of the audience. Vociferous cries for Fitz! Fitz! bring that hero to the front of



the curtain, where he gracefully bows, and wipes his brow languidly with a cambric handkerchief. The second act introduces my friend Turk West, in the character of Plantagenet. I am glad to find that he is a favourite with the audience, who clap their hands, two or three profane ones crying out, "Bravo, Turk! Go in and win!" I am not aware whether this is a stimulant to him, but he certainly "goes in" with vigour. The scene in which he appears is described as the grand hall in the castle, and its appointments are two chairs and a brown wooden table of modern manufacture. Very ruthless and very fierce indeed does Turk look, and he is accompanied by the pair of dead ruffians, who now appear as retainers: I recognise them by their buff boots. It is in vain that I endeavour to unravel the plot; the threads slip from me directly I attempt to gather them together. From a lengthy soliloquy indulged in by Plantagenet, I learn that he is not the rightful owner of the battlemented castle. Seventeen years ago he killed a noble

prince in cold blood (which popular phrase cannot be a correct one), and murdered his beautiful child, the last, last scion of a noble race. (Here Turk grows magnificent, and "goes in" with a will.) Oh, agony! He beholds once more their mangled corpses, he sees the death-sweat br-reaking on their brows! The demon of remorse is tearing at his vitals. Oh, would he could recall the past, and restore the two wooden chairs and the table to their rightful owner! During the applause that follows, Turk winks at me, and I am delighted. The low-comedy man and a waiting-maid in short petticoats and an embroidered apron, as was the fashion with waiting maids in the days of chivalry, play important comic parts in the piece, and send the audience into convulsions of laughter. But the plot has quite baffled me, and I have given up all hope of unravelling it. The Knight of the Sable Plume has been thrown into prison by Plantagenet, after a desperate fight with eight retainers (in slippers), and is released by the hand of the

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lovely Edith, to whom he swears eternal fealty. The last scene is the same as the first—a wood, with the (invisible) battle-mented castle in the distance. Plantagenet the Ruthless enters. He is mad with rage. His prisoner has escaped. He gnashes his teeth. He'll search the wide world through but he will find him. "Usurper! ye search not long. Behold him here!" He enters, the Knight of the Sable Plume. "At length we stand front to front! Back to thy teeth thy lying words! Villain! Defend thyself!" They fight to music. One, two, up; one, two, down; one, two, three, four, sideways. They turn round, and when they are face to face, they clash their swords terrifically. They lock their arms together, and fight that way. The gallant knight is getting the worst of it. He is forced first upon one knee, then upon the other. He fights round the stage in this position. By a Herculean effort he gains his feet. The swords flash fire. Ah, the usurper yields! He stumbles. He lies prostrate on the ground. Over him glares the knight.

“Recreant, beg thy miserable life!” “Never!” “Die, then, remorseless tyrant!” With a piercing shriek Edith rushes in, and cries, “Spare him, oh, spare him ; he is my father !” The Knight of the Sable Plume is softened ; his sword drops from his grasp. He kneels, and supports the head of the Ruthless. It is too late ; “Death has marked me for his own,” says Turk. The knight raises his visor. “Ah ! what is that scar upon thy brow ?” cries Turk. Avenging heaven ! it is *his* child. “These possessions are thine. Take them. Take my daughter. Her love will compensate for her father’s hate.” He joins their hands, and turning up the whites of his eyes (which elicits from the gallery cries of “Bravo, Turk !”) and saying, “I die hap-pappy !”) proceeds to do so in the most approved corkscrew style. Thus ended “The Knight of the Sable Plume,” by far the most incomprehensible piece of romance it had been my good fortune to witness. Mr. Horace Saint Herbert Fitzherbert was called before the curtain at the end of the drama, and appeared ; there were calls also for Turk,

but he did not appear. He gloomily informed me when the performance was over, that Fitzherbert was on a "starring" engagement, and that it was in the agreement that in his own pieces nobody should be allowed to appear before the curtain but himself. On reference to the play-bill, I found that in "The Lonely Murder at the Wayside Inn" Turk was the murderer, and I am afraid to say how many times he deserved to be hanged for the dreadful crimes he performed in "The Trials and Vicissitudes of a Servant-Girl." In the last piece the allegorical tableau in coloured fires may have conveyed a good moral, but the smell was suggestive of the lower regions, where good morals are not fashionable.

Following out the instructions given to me by Turk, I made my way, when the curtain fell for the last time, to the dressing-room at the back of the stage, and whispered my praises of my friend's acting. Before we went home, he and a number of his professional brethren "looked in" at a neighbouring bar, where pewter pots were freely handed about.

There was no lack of animated conversation, and the subject of course was the drama. One man, who had played a small character in "The Knight of the Sable Plume," and played it well, was holding forth to two or three unprofessional friends on the peculiar hardship of his case. As he had not played in the last piece, I inferred from his condition that he had been regaling himself at the bar for some time before we entered. He was an elderly man, and Turk whispered to me that he had once been leading man in the theatre, but that he had come down in the world. Those who addressed him by name called him Mac.

"Ah, Turk, my boy," he said, giving Turk a left-hand grasp; his right hand held his glass of whisky-toddy—"ah, my sons, come in to drink? That's right. Drown dull care."

"You've tried to do that for a pretty considerable time, Mac," said Turk good-humouredly. "Take a pull at the pewter, Chris."

“I have, my boy, I have,” returned Mac; “I’m an old stager now, but, dammee! there’s life in the old boy yet. I’ll play Claude Melnotte with the youngest of you. I’m ready to commence all over again. Show me a more juvenile man than I am on the boards, and, dammee! I’ll stand glasses round. I will—and pay for them if I can borrow the money!”

A volley of laughter greeted this sally, in which Mac joined most heartily.

“Drown dull care!” he continued. “I’ve done it for a pretty considerable time, as Turk says. Dammee, my sons! I’ve done it all my life, and I’d advise you to do the same. Care killed a cat, so beware. Before you came in, my sons, I was speaking to these gentlemen”—indicating his unprofessional friends—“who kindly asked me to take a glass with them—thank you, I don’t mind if I do; my glass is empty; another whisky-toddy if you please, miss—The cry is still they come! eh, my sons?—I was speaking to these gentlemen, whose names I have

not the pleasure of knowing, but who take an interest in the profession. I was speaking to them of myself, in connection with the noble art. I was saying that I act for my bread——”

“And sack,” interrupted a member of the company. “And sack, Mac.”

“Hang it, no, my son!” exclaimed the old actor, with a capital mixture of humour and dignity. “I act for my bread; I let my friends pay for the sack. I may, or I may not, be an ornament to my profession; that is a matter of public opinion and public taste; but whether I am or am not, I am not ashamed to say I act for my bread. I was speaking to these gentlemen also—your healths, gentlemen—of the decadence of the drama. In the halcyon days of youth, in the days of the great Kemble (I made him my model; I trust I do not tarnish his fair fame), the drama was worth something. But now, when a fellow like this Fitzherbert—a man who has been pitchforked, so to speak, into



the profession—comes in and takes all the fat of the piece, and when he is puffed and posted and advertised into a successful engagement, and when every other worthy member of the company is pushed into a corner, and compelled, so to speak, to hold a variety of lighted candles to show off *his* spurious brightness, it's an infernal hard thing to each of us as individuals, and a degradation to the drama as an art!"

"Bravo, Mac!" said one and another, some in sincerity, some to humour the old actor.

"You are certainly right, sir," said one of the strangers, speaking with the deference due to so eminent an authority. "Your glass is empty; will you fill again?"

"Ay, till the crack of doom," was the ready reply. "Right, sir! of course I'm right."

"But," said another of the strangers, not quite so deferential as the former speaker, "some one must play second fiddle."

"Second fiddle, sir! Yes, I admit it, sir.

Some one *must* play second fiddle—and third fiddle too, if you like. But let the man who plays second fiddle *be* a second fiddle, and not a first fiddle.”

“Who is to blame for all this?” asked the deferential stranger.

“Who’s to blame, sir! The public, sir—the public. But what consolation is that to me? I must live, sir, I suppose. I must feed my family, or answer for it to the beak. Here am I, who will place my Macbeth in comparison with any man’s—who can play Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Brutus, in a masterly manner—I don’t say it of myself; it has been said *of* me—here am I compelled to knuckle-under to a man young enough to be my son, and with not a tenth part of my brains or experience. And what’s the consequence? I haven’t had a call for six months, while he gets called on three times a night. Why, sir, I remember the time when a discriminating audience called me on six times in one piece! I’ve had a dozen bouquets thrown to me in one night! And now, sir, these things are

forgotten, and old Mac is shelved, sir, shelved !”

“The public ought to be ashamed of themselves,” said the deferential stranger.

“But the public’s not all to blame. It’s the managers, who allow themselves to be led, like tame sheep, into the trap ; they haven’t the moral courage to stand up against it. And what’s a man, or a manager, without moral courage ? I wouldn’t mind it so much, but what’s the consequence ? A star is engaged upon shares, at an enormous screw, and to make this up, all *our* screws are reduced. That’s where it comes hard. I pledge you my dramatic word, my screw isn’t so much by seven-and-sixpence a week as it was six months ago. Who gets my seven-and-six ? Why, who but the star ? And my poor children must starve and perish, or go on the parish, if they hadn’t a self-denying parent, who would pawn his shirt before they should come to want. I’ll take another glass of whisky-toddy—my last, sir, my last to-night. Old Mac knows

when he's had enough. Turk, my son, a word in your ear."

Turk went aside with him, and I heard the jingling of coin.

"He's a rum old fellow," said Turk to me, as we walked home; "a good actor too, and might have got on well if he hadn't been so much engaged all his life in drowning care."

"You gave him some money?" I said.

"Lent it to him, Chris; only fourpence halfpenny. The old fellow never borrows even money; it's always an exact sum for an exact purpose that he wants—fourteenpence, or eightpence halfpenny, or sevenpence, or some other odd amount. He was never known to borrow a shilling or a half-crown. There's a good deal of truth in what he says, Chris."

"I am sorry for his wife and children," I said.

"The best of it is," replied Turk, laughing, "that the old fellow has only two sons, and the youngest is thirty-four years of age,

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and in a very good way. But it pleases old Mac to talk like that, and he has talked like it so long, that I've no doubt he really believes that he *has* a destitute family somewhere, who would starve if he couldn't borrow his fourpence halfpennies and his sevenpences now and then. It's one of the best things I know."

Altogether this night's entertainment was a most enjoyable one to me, and gave me much food for reflection.

## CHAPTER VII.

### HOLDING THE WORD OF PROMISE TO THE EAR.

So far as I could judge from outward appearances, the coldness between uncle Bryan and Jessie increased with time, rather than lessened. Their natures seemed to be in direct antagonism, and every effort to make things pleasant between them completely failed. My mother often made such efforts in her quiet loving way; Jessie herself wooed him, after her fashion, when the humour was on her; but he was implacable, except on one occasion to which I shall presently refer.

“He ought,” said Jessie to me, “to be at the head of a monastery of monks; he

thinks it is a crime even to laugh. What sort of a young man was he, I wonder?"

I could have told her, but the seal of secrecy was on my tongue. I need scarcely say that all my sympathies were with Jessie. I was an attentive observer of the state of things at home, and I had many confidential conversations with my mother concerning matters. Loving Jessie as I did, I could not, in my heart, be tolerant and kind to uncle Bryan, as she begged me to be; the hard and stern rules which he had set down for himself, the following out of which by us might possibly have won his favour, would have made life a burden. I applied these rules to himself, and his own life was his own condemnation. There was no question in my mind as to whether he was right or wrong. But I could not win my mother to my way of thinking; nor did I endeavour after a little while, for I saw that it gave her pain. Never did a hard word pass her lips concerning him; she had affectionate excuses for him in every fresh

difference between him and Jessie. I thought she was wrong, but I did not tell her so, nor did I distress her by endeavouring to explain to her that her own conduct was a contradiction to her words. That she never missed an opportunity to be tender and gentle to Jessie was a sufficiently strong argument against uncle Bryan. In her love for my mother Jessie never wavered; it seemed to me to grow stronger every day. Sometimes when we were at home together—it was not a very frequent occurrence now, for Jessie and I were generally out of an evening at the Wests', or at a theatre for which orders had been given to us—I observed Jessie watching us; but when she saw my eyes upon her, she would turn hers away thoughtfully. One night we had come home late; uncle Bryan was abed; my mother had prepared supper for us. We sat down, and after supper fell into silence; I do not know what I was thinking of, but we remained silent for many minutes. Happening to look in the direction of my mother, I saw her



wistful eyes upon me, and at the same moment Jessie rose, and, kneeling before my mother, drew her face down, and kissed it. I was by their side in an instant, and the three of us were clasped in one embrace; but Jessie quickly released herself, and left me and my mother together.

Time went on and there was no change, except that we were growing older, and that Jessie was growing more and more beautiful. I was getting along well, and as I was earning fair wages, I contributed, with pride, a fair sum towards the expenses of the house. I was enabled to make my mother and Jessie many little presents now, and I sometimes coaxed my mother to buy Jessie a new dress or a new hat, and not to let her know that they came from me. On the anniversary of my twenty-first birthday we had a party at home, the four of us, and were happier and more comfortable in each other's society than we had been for a long time. Even uncle Bryan softened—not only towards me, but towards Jessie.

“Your boyhood is over,” said uncle Bryan ; “you are now a man, with a man’s responsibility, and a man’s work to do in life. Do it well.”

“I will try to, uncle,” I replied.

“To perform one’s duties,” continued uncle Bryan, “taxes a man’s judgment very severely ; and as a man’s judgment is generally the slave of his inclination it is seldom that he can look back upon his life with satisfaction.”

“I don’t quite understand that,” I observed ; “if a man’s inclinations are good——”

Uncle Bryan interrupted me, for I had paused. He took up my words. “Inclination is an idle selfish imp. Life is full of temptations, and inclination leads us to them ; we follow only too readily.”

“All that we can do,” said my mother, caressing me fondly, “is to do our best ; we are often the slave of circumstances, Bryan.”

“In many cases,” he replied, “not in all, a man can rise above them. We do not

exercise our reason sufficiently. We cry and fret like children because things are not exactly as we wish."

"Do you?" asked Jessie quickly.

He answered her evasively. "I have my sorrows."

"I am glad of that," said Jessie, in a low tone.

"There is more wisdom in your remark," he said, with a thoughtful observance of her, "than you probably imagine. I give you credit for using it in the best and kindest sense."

"I meant it in that sense," said Jessie gently, drawing a little nearer to him.

"Will you tell me why you are glad that I should have sorrows?"

"For one reason——"

"Well?"

"It does not remove you so far from us," said Jessie, with less confidence than she usually exhibited.

"I try to do that?" he asked. "I try to remove myself from you?"

"I think so," she answered. "You are not angry with me?"

"No, child," he said, and the gentleness of his tone surprised me.

"But for sorrow and trouble," mused my mother, "the tenderest qualities of our nature would never be shown. God is very good to us in our hardest trials. Dear Bryan! I am thinking of the time when Chris and I were in London without a friend. As I look upon my darling boy now, and think of the happy future there is before him——" She did not complete her sentence, but she went towards uncle Bryan, and stooped and kissed him.

"Say no more, Emma," he said huskily; "you do not know how vastly the balance is in your favour."

"Notwithstanding your sorrows?" questioned Jessie.

"Yes," he replied, with an approving nod, "notwithstanding my sorrows. You are sharp-witted, Jessie."

"Thank you, nuncle!" she said merrily.

It was almost like the commencement of a new and more harmonious era in our relations with one another.

“How old are you, Jessie?” I asked.

“I shall be eighteen in a little more than three months. A girl becomes a woman at eighteen, I am told. I shall expect to be treated with dignity then, Chris.”

The greatest wonder of the evening was reserved for its close. Uncle Bryan was the first to rise and wish us good-night. He grasped my hand warmly, and kissed my mother. He did not offer to shake hands with Jessie, but wished her good-night, and lingered at the door, waiting for her response; but it did not come. He turned to go, but before he could leave the room, she was by his side.

“Why are you so kind to others,” she asked, “and so cold to me?” He stood silent, looking upon the ground. “I want to love you if you will let me; I want you to love me. Say ‘Good-night, dear Jessie,’ and kiss me.”

He did exactly as she desired. "Good-night, dear Jessie," he said, and they kissed each other. He drew his arm round her, and I saw a tender light flash into his face, and rob it of its habitual sternness of expression. But it was gone in a moment, and he with it.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WE ENJOY A DECEITFUL CALM.

THE harmonious relations between uncle Bryan and Jessie which my birthday seemed to have inaugurated continued for more than a fortnight, a result entirely due to Jessie's untiring efforts to conciliate him, and to "keep him good," as she expressed it. On the day following that on which I came of age, he showed symptoms of irritability at the tenderness into which he had been betrayed—for that undoubtedly was the light in which he viewed it; he had a suspicion that he had been played upon, and he was annoyed with himself for his weakness. Having, I doubt not, thought the matter well over during the night, and having quite made up his mind to vindi-

cate himself, he came down in the morning more than usually morose and reserved, and received Jessie's affectionate advances in his coldest and most repellent manner. But Jessie would not permit him to relapse into his old cross humour; she charmed it out of him by a display of wonderful submission and tenderness, and by answering his snappish words with gentleness. In this way she disarmed him, and he, after some resistance, and with a singular mixture of pleasure and ungraciousness in his manner, allowed himself to be beguiled by her. The truth of the proverb that "a soft answer turneth away wrath" was never better exemplified. If, when she had wooed him into a kinder mood, she had shown any signs of triumph, her influence over him would have come to an end immediately; he watched furtively for some such sign, and detecting none, resigned himself to this new and pleasant beguilement. Whether Jessie's conduct sprang from impulse or reason, she could not have behaved more wisely.



My mother was greatly rejoiced, and told me from day to day all that passed between these opposite natures. That the links of home love which bound us together were being strengthened was a source of exceeding delight to her.

“And it is all Jessie’s doings, mother.”

“It is, my dear. I scarcely believed her capable of so much gentleness and submission.” (Here I thought to myself, “I believe no one but I knows of what Jessie is capable.”) “When your uncle is most trying——”

“As he often is,” I interrupted, “and without cause.”

“Well, my dear, if you will have it so. When he is most trying, she is most gentle, and she wins him to her side almost despite himself. And, Chris, I really think he likes it.”

“Who would not,” I exclaimed, “when wooed by Jessie?”

“It is in her power,” said my mother, with a sweet smile of acquiescence, “to make a great change in him. There is an under-

current of deep tenderness in your uncle's nature, and Jessie is reaching it by the most delicate means. If she will only have patience! for it will take time, my dear."

But these fair appearances were treacherous. Neither my mother nor I saw the clouds that were gathering, and when the storm burst I was impressed by the unhappy conviction that I, and I alone, was the cause. How little do we know of the power of light words lightly spoken! But for certain inconsiderate words which I had used, there would certainly have been sunshine in our house for a much longer time. As it was, this better aspect of things was destined soon to come to an end, and to come to an end in a way which introduced not only a more bitter discord between Jessie and uncle Bryan, but imbued us insidiously with a want of faith in one another. The storm broke suddenly, and without forewarning to uncle Bryan and my mother. But in the meantime the harmony was almost perfect. Jessie, when she went to bed, no longer parted from uncle

Bryan with a careless "Good-night," but kissed him regularly every morning and every night, and he submitted to the caress without, however, inviting it by look or word. Even that wonder took place on a certain evening when Jessie, with a touch of her old ways upon her, wished us all good night in a careless tone, and without kissing uncle Bryan. She opened and closed the door, but did not leave the room, and placed her fingers on her lips with a bright eager look in our direction, warning us not to betray her. Uncle Bryan's back was towards us, and he made no motion at first. Jessie stole quietly behind his chair, and stood there in silence. Presently, uncle Bryan turned his head slowly to the door, with something of a yearning look of regret in his face, and at the same instant Jessie's arms were round his neck, and her lips were pressed to his.

"Don't be angry with me," she said.

"Angry, Jessie! I thought you had forgotten me. But you are as full of tricks as Puck was."

"I can't help it, uncle Bryan. Good-night!"

"Good-night, my dear."

And Jessie went to bed with a very light heart, and left light hearts behind her. It was apparent that these enchanting ways were pleasant to uncle Bryan, and I told Jessie so.

"It softens him, Jessie."

"It takes a long time to soften a rock," she observed, with a thoughtful smile.

"If anybody can do it, you can, Jessie."

"You think nothing but good of me, Chris."

"I only say what I feel. And you really want uncle Bryan to love you?"

"Yes—more than I can say—and I can scarcely tell why."

"Except," I said, with a foolish hesitation, "that you like to be loved by everybody."

"Perhaps it is because of that, Chris. I *do* like everybody to love me. It is much nicer so."

If I wanted any consolation I supplied it by observing: "To be sure, there are different kinds of love."

“Indeed!” exclaimed Jessie tantalisingly. “Is it like uncle Bryan’s sugar, of different shades and different degrees of sweetness? Some of it tastes very sandy, Chris.”

“Ah, now you are joking, Jessie!”

“I am not in a joking humour. I want to speak seriously. Chris, I have sometimes wondered that you have never asked me questions about myself.”

“In what way, Jessie?”

“About myself, before I came here. When one likes any one very much, one is naturally curious to know all about one.”

“I had my reasons, Jessie. When you first came, mother wished me not to ask you any questions. She said it would be like an attempt to steal into uncle Bryan’s confidence. He might have secrets, she said, which he would not wish us to know.”

“Secrets!” she mused. “What can I have to do with them? And yet, it is strange, now I think about it.”

“I should like you to tell me all about

yourself," I said; "it doesn't matter now that you have spoken of it first yourself."

"I was thinking of a secret that I have, Chris."

I composed myself to receive her confidence.

"But I don't know what it is myself, yet. It is in a letter; perhaps——"

"Well, Jessie?"

"Perhaps nothing. It is only a letter that I am not to open until I am eighteen years of age. That will not be long, Chris. We will wait until then, and then I will tell you all I know. Let us blow it away till that time comes." She blew a light breath. "I wanted to make you a present on your birthday, but I did not have money enough then. Shall I give it to you now?" I held out my hand eagerly, and Jessie took from her pocket a small card box. "It is in this. What do you think it is?" I made a great many guesses, but she shook her head merrily at all of them. "I went to look at it every day in the shop-window,

afraid that some one might buy it before I had saved up money enough."

I opened the box, and took from it a small silver locket, heart-shaped, with the words engraven on it, "To Chris, with Jessie's love." Unspeakable happiness dwelt in my heart as I gazed upon the emblem. As I held it in my hand tenderly, it seemed to me a living link between Jessie and me—an undying assurance of her love. Nothing so precious had ever been mine. My looks satisfied Jessie, and she clapped her hands in delight.

"So you like it, Chris?"

"I will never, never part with it, Jessie. But I want a piece of ribbon; may I have that piece round your neck?"

"Take it off yourself, Chris."

What a bungler I was, and how long it took me to remove the piece of simple ribbon, need not here be described. I know that while my trembling fingers were about her neck, Jessie, in reply to a look, said, "Yes, you may, Chris;" and that I kissed her.

"And now, Chris," she said, "I want to speak to you about something that is troubling me very much. When you said the other night that uncle Bryan was an Atheist, were you in earnest?"

"I said what I believed," I answered with an uneasy feeling.

"And he *is* an Atheist?"

"I am afraid he is, Jessie."

"Has he ever told you so?"

"Oh, no; there are some things that one scarcely dares to speak of."

"That is if one is weak and a coward. I am not that, and I don't think you are, Chris. Then I suppose you have never spoken to uncle Bryan about religion?"

"Not a word has ever passed between us upon religious matters."

"An Atheist is a person who does not believe in God, is he not, Chris?"

I was sensible that the discussion of so solemn a subject might lead to grave results, and I wished to discontinue it; but Jessie said:



“Don’t be weak, Chris; I think I ought to know these things, and if *we* can’t speak together in confidence, no two persons in the world can. Of course I can easily find out what I want to know; Gus West will tell me everything; but I came to you because we are nearer to each other.”

“Nearer and dearer, Jessie.”

“Yes, Chris; and now tell me what you know.”

I told her all that I knew concerning Atheism, and all that I knew concerning uncle Bryan in connection with it. “When I was a boy, Jessie, scarcely a week after we came to live with uncle Bryan, I heard him say that life was tasteless to him, and that he believed in nothing. I thought of it often afterwards.”

“Life was tasteless to him *because* he did not believe in anything; that is the proper view to take of it. If a person does not believe in anything, he cannot love anything. Can you imagine anything more dreary than the life of a person who does

not love anybody, and who has nobody to love him? I can't. A person might as well be a stick or a stone—better to be that, for then he couldn't feel. But the words that uncle Bryan used may not have meant what you suppose, Chris."

"They came in this way, Jessie. On the first Sunday we were here, mother asked uncle Bryan if he was going to church. He said that he never went to church. Mother was very sorry, I saw, but she did not say anything more. On that same night, uncle Bryan was reading a book, and he read aloud some passages from it. Mother asked him what was the name of the book, and he answered, 'The Age of Reason.' When he laid the book aside, mother took it up, and looked at it; and then she sent me upstairs for the Bible. That was all; but I didn't quite know what was the real meaning of it until a long time afterwards, when I found out what kind of a book 'The Age of Reason' is."

"Tell me what it is."

"It is a book written by an Atheist for

Atheists ; it might almost be called the Atheist's Bible, Jessie.'

"And did you never speak to your mother about uncle Bryan's religion?"

"I have tried to, but mother is like me ; there are some things she does not like to speak of."

"And this is one of them," said Jessie, following out her train of thought ; "and out of your love for her, when she said, 'Let us talk of something else, my dear,' you have talked of something else."

"That is so, Jessie. It is almost as if you overheard what we said."

"It is easy to see into your mother's heart, Chris. She did not like to speak about uncle Bryan's religion, because she loves him, and because she wants you to love him. Now, if it had been anything that would have made uncle Bryan stand out in a good light, she would have encouraged you to speak about it."

"That is true enough, Jessie."

"Chris, your mother is all heart."

"She is everything that is good, if you mean that?"

"I do mean that; she is the best, the sweetest, the dearest woman in the world. Ah, if I were like her! But I am very different. What I say and what I think comes more often out of my head than out of my heart. Chris, it is impossible for an Atheist to be a good man!"

I saw the pit we were walking into, but I had not the skill to lead Jessie away from it.

"A man who does not believe in God," she exclaimed, "cannot believe in anything good. No wonder that he is what he is. I am not satisfied—I am not satisfied! It is shocking—shocking to think of!" She shook her head at herself, and I listened to her words in no pleasant frame of mind. She was showing me an entirely new phase in her character. It was Jessie reasoning, and reasoning on the most solemn of subjects. "Why," she continued, "God made everything that's good, and if uncle Bryan is an

Atheist, he is a bad man. And yet your mother loves him."

"That she does, Jessie, with all her heart."

"She couldn't love anything that's bad. If you were an Atheist, Chris, I should hate you."

"Thank God, I am not, Jessie; even if I were, you could make me different. But I don't like to hear you speak like this," I said reproaching myself bitterly for having been the cause of this conversation; for when I had told Jessie that uncle Bryan was an Atheist I had spoken with a full measure of dislike towards him. "Mother does not reason as you do. After all, I may be mistaken, Jessie, and we may be doing him a great injustice. I know so much that is good of him—more than you possibly imagine."

And then I told her what, from a false feeling of shame, I had hitherto withheld from her—the story of my mother's hard battle with the world when we came to London, and of uncle Bryan's noble behaviour to

us when we were sunk in the bitterest poverty.

“All the time I have known him, Jessie, I have never known him to be guilty of an unjust action. He is as upright and honest a man as ever lived. Can such a man be a bad man?”

“Upright, honest, and just!” she repeated my words in a musing tone. “It is an enigma.”

“He would die,” I continued warmly, “rather than be guilty of a mean action. Now that we are speaking of him in this way, I am ashamed of myself for ever thinking ill of him. Mother was right, from the very first—she was right about him, as she always is about everything. If he were not so hard—— But you don’t know what trials he has gone through in his life.”

“Do you?”

“I know some of them, but I am pledged not to speak of them to any one—not even to you. One thing happened to him—never hint, for my sake, Jessie, that you

even suspect it—one thing happened to him so terrible and so dreadful that it is no wonder he is hard and cold and morose. Many and many a time mother has entreated me to be kind and charitable in my thoughts towards him, and instead of doing so I have repaid all his kindness by the basest of ingratitude.”

“How have you done that, Chris?”

“By saying anything to you to cause you to dislike him. Ah, you may shake your head, but it is so, Jessie. If he were in my place, and I in his, he would come to me and ask me to forgive him; but I haven’t the courage and the fearless heart that he has, and I shouldn’t know how to do it without giving him pain.”

I was really very remorseful, and sincerely so; but Jessie said nothing to comfort me.

“Have I had no reason of my own, until the last few days, to dislike him? Has he behaved quite kindly to me? Chris, is it possible that I am wrong in nearly everything that I have done? How many times

have I tried to conciliate him, and how many times has he answered me with unkind words! There is some reason for it—there is some reason for it.”

“And yet remember, Jessie,” I said, without thinking, “that he has given you a home, as he gave one to us, never asking for a return—never expecting one.”

Her face turned scarlet.

“Would *he* have said that?” she asked, and left me without another word.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE STORM BREAKS.

JESSIE'S moods were sufficiently variable and perplexing to cause me serious uneasiness, but I had no suspicion of what was in her mind when she spoke of uncle Bryan and his religious opinions, or I should have used my strongest efforts to avert the storm. Even when she made her first open move, which she did on the evening of the same day on which we had the conversation just recorded, I did not suspect her ; truth to tell, my mind at that time was almost completely occupied by one theme—the locket which Jessie had given me, and its significance. As a charm, it was most potent in its power of bringing happiness to the wearer ; I felt that while

this locket was in my possession, it would be impossible for a cloud to shadow my life. But clouds came all too quickly.

We were sitting together in the evening, in the most amicable of moods. Suddenly Jessie addressed uncle Bryan.

“Uncle Bryan, who teaches the young?”

He looked enquiringly at her.

“Well,” she continued, understanding that an explanation was expected of her, “one has to learn things; knowledge doesn’t come of itself.”

“Assuredly not,” he said, with evident pleasure and curiosity; “even parent birds teach their brood the use of their wings, and how to build their nests.”

“I did not know that; but it is of men and women I am speaking. They are higher than birds and beasts.”

“Yes,” he said, in a reflective tone; “it is so.”

“If the world were filled with nothing but old people, I wonder what sort of a world it would be!”

“It would soon be no world at all,” he said ; and added, with good humoured depreciation, “and while it lasted it would be a very disagreeable world, if the inhabitants in any way resembled me.”

“Never mind that, uncle Bryan ; perhaps some people try to make themselves out a great deal worse than they are. So, then, there *must* be young people ; that is a necessity.”

“As much a necessity as the seasons ; it is the law of nature.”

“A good law ?”

“Undoubtedly, young philosopher.” His manner was almost blithe.

“Well, then, to come back, as a friend of mine says. The young do not know what is right and wrong, and knowledge does not come of itself. Who teaches them ?”

“The old,” he replied readily.

“Because they are more likely to know what is right and wrong.”

“For that reason, I should say. They have

had more time to learn, and they have had more experience of the world."

"Of course," she said, "and experience means wisdom. The old *must* know better than the young."

"Naturally."

"And young people should be guided by old people?"

"It would be better if that were more generally done."

"That is all I wanted to know."

Before many days were over, Jessie made her meaning apparent. She always accompanied my mother and me to church, and on the Sunday following this conversation she unmasked her battery.

"Uncle Bryan," she said, while we were at breakfast, "I want you to come to church with us this morning."

A startled look flashed into my mother's eyes; uncle Bryan stared at Jessie, and bit his lips. He did not reply immediately.

"Young ladies have many wants," he said.

"But this is a good want," she pleaded.

There was nothing saucy or defiant in her tone or manner; both were very gentle. "But this is a good want. You will come with us?"

"I will not come with you," he replied sternly.

"Do you never go to church?"

"Never."

"Why?"

"That is my affair." The corners of his lips began to twitch.

"Is it not good to go to church?" she asked, still in a gentle tone, her colour beginning to rise. I noted with consternation these familiar signs of the coming battle. The shock was the more bitter because, to all outward appearance, everything had been fair between them until this moment. Only the night before we had stopped up half an hour later than usual, because the time was passing very pleasantly to all of us.

"My dear," said my mother, with a sweet smile, taking Jessie's hand in hers; "my dear, you forget!"

“Forget what, mother?” asked Jessie; she sometimes addressed my mother thus. “Am I doing anything wrong?”

Even I could not help acknowledging to myself that Jessie, by a literal acceptance of my mother’s words, was wilfully misinterpreting the nature and intent of her remonstrance; but I found justification for her.

“Uncle Bryan is the best judge,” said my mother.

“I know he is,” said Jessie.

“Let her go on,” cried uncle Bryan.

The old stern look was in his face, and his voice was very harsh. I was the more unhappy, because I alone held the key of the situation. Jessie repeated the question, addressing herself to uncle Bryan.

“Is it not good to go to church?”

“I do not say that,” was his reply.

“But I want you to say one way or the other. It *must* be either good or bad. You will come with us!”

“I will not come with you.”

The high tone in which he spoke put a stop to the discussion, and we finished the breakfast in the midst of an unhappy silence. Indeed, we all seemed too frightened to speak. At the proper time my mother and I were ready for church, and were waiting down-stairs for Jessie, whom my mother had left in their room dressing. But Jessie was somewhat more dilatory than usual. My mother went to the stairs, and softly called out,

“Now, my child, be quick, or we shall be late !”

It was the first time I had ever heard my mother call Jessie her child, and I pressed her hand fondly for it. She returned the pressure, almost convulsively, and presently Jessie came slowly down-stairs. She was dressed with unusual care in a pretty new soft dress, concerning the making of which there had been great excitement ; but her head was uncovered.

“Get on your hat quickly, my dear,” said my mother ; “we shall have to walk fast.”

“I am not going to church,” said Jessie,

in a low tone, in which I—and I alone, I believe—detected a tremor.

“Jessie!” cried my mother, in a tone of suffering. “Jessie, my dear child!”

She stepped to Jessie’s side, trembling from agitation. Jessie stood quite quietly by the table, and repeated, in a tone which she strove in vain to make steady,

“I am not going to church this morning.”

Uncle Bryan was in the room, but spoke not a word.

“Are you not well, my dear?” asked my mother.

“I am quite well.”

“Then why will you not come with us?”

“I am not sure that it is right to go to church.”

“My dear, if I tell you that it is——”

“Uncle Bryan is older than you—twenty years older—and has had more experience of the world; therefore he must know better than you. If it were right to go to church, he would go, for I am sure he is an upright and just man.”



At this direct reference to him, uncle Bryan raised his head, and gazed fixedly at Jessie, and at her latter words something like a sneer passed into his face. My mother looked helplessly from one to another.

"I know," said Jessie, "that I am the cause of this trouble, and I wish—oh, I wish!—that I had never come into the house! No, I don't wish it, for then I should never have known you!" She stood very humbly before my mother. "I feel how ungrateful I am : to uncle Bryan for giving me a home"—(how these words stung me!)"—"and to you for giving me a love of which I am so undeserving."

The tears came into her eyes, and I went towards her, but she moved a step from me ; and thus apart from each other we four stood for a few moments in perfect silence—a house pulsing with love and tenderness, but divided against itself. Then Jessie said suddenly,

"Uncle Bryan, if I go to church this

morning, will you come with us some time during the year."

"No," he replied, sternly and firmly.

"I have asked you in the wrong way, perhaps," she said; "but that would not alter the thing itself."

"Whichever way you asked me, my answer would have been the same, young lady."

"If you tell me to go now, I will go."

"I will tell you nothing. You are your own mistress."

"How are the young to be taught, then, if the old will not teach them?"

In the presence of my mother's distress he had no answer to make, and I felt that it was out of consideration for her, and not from any desire to spare himself, that he went into the shop, and left us to ourselves.

Then Jessie to my mother:

"I hope you will forgive me, but if I knew I should have died for it I could not have helped doing what I've done. Don't be grieved for me; I'm not worth it. I am going to spend the morning with Miss West."

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My mother and I went to church by ourselves ; but I fear that my mood was not a very devout one. My mind was filled with what had taken place at home, and its probable consequences.

## CHAPTER X.

### COLOUR-BLIND.

THE consequences were more serious than any one of us could possibly have imagined, with the single exception of uncle Bryan ; where we hoped, he reasoned, and reasoned with bitterness against himself. There are in the world a sort of men with whom you are for ever at a disadvantage—men who from various motives are strangely, and oft-times cruelly, reticent as regards themselves, their thoughts, and their actions. These men receive your confidences, but do not confide in you in return ; they listen to your schemes, your hopes, your fears, but say not a word concerning their own. You wear your heart upon your sleeve ; they lock up theirs jeal-

ously, and place upon them an impenetrable seal, which perhaps once or twice in a lifetime they remove—perhaps never. Uncle Bryan was one of these men. Scarcely by a look had he ever shown us his heart, and it required a nature not only more noble and generous, but more self-sacrificing, than mine, not to misjudge him—to be even tolerant of him.

All our hopes of a more harmonious feeling between him and Jessie were utterly shattered, and my birthday, instead of being the commencement of a brighter and better era in our home relations, inaugurated an era of much unhappiness and discomfort. In the most unfortunate, and yet, as it seemed to me, in the most natural way, we were placed in a painfully-delicate position of antagonism. Who was to blame for this? I found the answer to this question without difficulty. Who but uncle Bryan was to blame? The part which Jessie had taken in the conversations between them was dictated by the best of feelings—was good and tender—

and I admired her, not only for her courage, but for the affection she had displayed towards him, and for her efforts to wean him from his moroseness and infidelity. That she had failed was no fault of hers. The fault lay entirely in himself, and in his insensibility to softening influences. That, if she had succeeded, the result would have been both good and beautiful, was incontrovertible. I argued the matter very closely in my mind, for, notwithstanding my love for Jessie, I was anxious not to do uncle Bryan an injustice, and I could come but to one conclusion: that no home could be happy with a master who possessed such a nature as his. He was like a dark shadow moving among us, and turning our joy into gloom.

These were partly the result of my reflections. Other considerations also arose. We were all bound to one another by ties of affection. This seemed a certainty, in the first blush of my reflections; but afterwards a doubt occurred to my mind. By what tie of affection was Jessie bound to uncle Bryan?

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He himself, when he told my mother and me the story of his life, had confessed it : by none. The charge of Jessie had almost been forced upon him, and his sense of duty had compelled him to accept it. It was not humanity that had impelled him to give Jessie a home. And if, after she came among us, she had failed to win his love, it was because his heart was hard and cold, and incapable of tenderness. I recalled a hundred little ways in which she had wooed him, and every one of them was an argument against him. Then I thought of her helpless dependent position, and my love for her and my anger against him grew stronger. That he was hard to her was an additional reason why I should show her openly, and without false weakness, that in me she had a champion and a friend who would be true to her until death. Even if I did not love her, I argued, this championship of one who was cast as a stranger amongst us would have been demanded of my manliness.

All these things were settled in my mind

before my mother and I returned home from church on that memorable Sabbath, but not a word passed between us on the subject. I was silent out of consideration for my mother ; she was silent out of the exquisite tenderness of her nature. Over and over again had she played the part of the Peacemaker between uncle Bryan and Jessie ; but knowing uncle Bryan as she did, she felt that in this crisis she was powerless. The day passed quietly and unhappily. Jessie joined us as we passed the house of the Wests, and walked home with us ; but during the whole of the day neither uncle Bryan nor she addressed each other, nor made any conciliatory movement towards each other. Once or twice she looked towards him, and the slightest look of kindness from him would, I knew, have brought her to his side. But although he was conscious of her gaze, he carefully avoided meeting it, and she, instinctively aware of his intention, looked towards him no more. It had been arranged that we should go to the Wests on this night ; our visits there



during the past fortnight had not been so frequent as usual; but as the time drew near, Jessie whispered to me that she intended to stop at home.

“I will run round,” she said, “and tell Josey that I can’t come; but you can go.”

“I shall do as you do, Jessie,” I said.

I thought afterwards that it was a great pity we stopped at home, for we were anything but lively company. Uncle Bryan might have been made of stone, so silent was he; Jessie rejected all my sympathising advances towards her; and even my mother was at a loss for words. I was curious about the “good-night” between uncle Bryan and Jessie when bedtime was near; it occupied Jessie’s thoughts also; but he settled it by lighting his candle and going to bed without bidding any one of us good-night. It was evident from this, and from uncle Bryan’s behaviour during the week that followed, that all harmonious relations between him and Jessie were at an end. On the next Sunday Jessie came to church with us as usual.

I fully expected that she would take an opportunity of speaking to me on the subject of her difference with uncle Bryan ; but as the time passed, and she did not speak of it, I approached the subject myself. I told her my opinion, and praised her for her courage.

“You are speaking against uncle Bryan,” she said.

“I can’t help it, Jessie ; he brings it on himself by his tyranny.”

“Tyranny !” she exclaimed. “Do you forget what you said, and what I believe—that he is upright, honest, and just ?”

“In other things he is ; but not in this. He is like a man who can see, and who is colour-blind.”

“That is,” she said, with a deprecatory shake of the head, “that he is Jessie-blind. Ah, Chris, if he is blind to what there is good in me, are you not blind to what there is bad ?” I was about to expostulate, but she stopped me : “I am not quite satisfied with myself ; I don’t know that it would not have been

better for me to have held my tongue. And another thing, Chris : I am not sure whether I am glad that you think I was right."

"Why, Jessie, what things you are saying!"

"I must say them, Chris, for I know what is in my mind. Answer me this question. Supposing you were not fond of me, as I know you are—I don't mind saying it now, for I am speaking very seriously—would you think then that I was right? Do you side with me out of your head or out of your heart?"

"My reason approves of what you did," I said earnestly; "I want you to believe that, Jessie. Say that you do believe it."

She did not reply.

"But," I persisted, "you must be glad to know that I am certain you are not to blame."

She shook her head, and said,

"Perhaps it would have been better if all of you had been against me."

"But who is against you, Jessie?" I persisted. "Mother is not, and I am not."

"Never mind that now, Chris. I can

see things that you can't see, because——” and she took my hand, and looked straight into my eyes.

“Because what, Jessie?”

“Because you are colour-blind, my dear,” she replied, half gravely, half sportively, using my own words against myself.

From this time her visits to the Wests grew even more frequent than they used to be. She was there not only in the evening—on which occasions I was always with her—but very often also in the day. My mother spoke of this to me regretfully, and said she was afraid that Jessie mistrusted her.

“Mistrust the sweetest woman in the world!” said Jessie. “No, indeed, indeed I do not! But can't you see, Chris, that I am better away?”

“No, I can't see it, Jessie—not that I have any objection to the Wests; you know that I am very fond of them.”

“Still colour-blind, Chris? you still can't see what I can see?”

"You are putting riddles to me, Jessie," I said.

"Well, you must find the answers without my assistance; and as to my going to the Wests so often in the daytime, what comfort do you think I find at home?"

None, I was compelled reluctantly to confess.

"Have you heard uncle Bryan complain of my absence?" continued Jessie. "Does he say that I am too often away?"

"No, Jessie, he has said nothing, to my knowledge."

"Because he sees nothing to regret in it."

"But mother does, Jessie."

"Chris," said Jessie, with tearful earnestness, "if I had a mother like yours I should thank God for her morning, noon, and night; and if I ever wavered in my love for her, in my faith in her, if I ever did anything to give her pain, I should pray to die!"

"You speak out of *my* heart, Jessie, as well as out of your own."

She gazed at me sadly and affectionately, and with something of wonder too.

“Well, well, Chris,” she said, “I have my plans; let me go my way.”

I was content that she should, having settled in my mind that her way was my way, and that her way was right. I had my plans also, which I did not disclose to Jessie. I was improving my position rapidly, and I knew that the day was not far distant when I should be able to support a home by my own labour—nay, I was at the present time almost in a position to do so. But there were things to be seen to and provided for—furniture and that like; and I was saving money for them secretly. I looked forward with eagerness to the accomplishment of my scheme, and I worked hard to hasten its ripening. The sweet pictures of home-happiness which I conjured up were sufficient incentives — pictures from which neither Jessie nor my mother was ever absent. “Then,” I thought, “Jessie will not be a dependent upon one who is filled

with unkind and uncharitable feelings towards her." It was on my tongue a dozen times to tell Jessie how I was progressing in my scheme, but I restrained myself. "No," I said, "I will not say anything to her about it until I am quite ready. Then I will speak openly to her. She knows that I love her, and that I am working for her."

But I could not keep my plans entirely to myself. I unfolded them to my mother, who sat silent for a little while after I had finished. Then she said,

"Have you not forgotten something, my dear?"

"No, mother, not that I know of."

"Or some one, I should rather say—your uncle Bryan."

I returned a disingenuous answer. "Uncle Bryan would never leave his shop. What would he find to do in a place where there were no customers to serve, and no business to look after?" (I added mentally, "and where he was not master and tyrant?")

"Chris, my dear child," said my mother

humbly and imploringly, "do not hide your heart from me!"

"Mother!" I cried, shocked at myself.

"Dear child, forgive me! It was forgetfulness on your part, I know, and unkind of me to put such a construction upon it. My boy could not be ungrateful. He knows how I love him, how proud I am of him. How well I remember his promise to me one night—in the old times, my darling, when I used to take in needlework for a living—that he would try to grow into a good man; and how grateful I am to the Lord to see him after all these years a good and clever man, the best, the dearest son that mother was ever blessed with!"

The old times came vividly before me, and a strangely-penitent feeling stirred my heart as I looked into my mother's face, with its expression of yearning love, and thought of the road I had traversed from boyhood to manhood. Bright and beautiful was this road with flowers of sweet affection; a heart whose tenderness time nor



trouble could not weaken had cheered me on the way, and unselfish hands had made it smooth for me. The faithful mother who had strewn these flowers was by my side now, shedding the light of her sacred love upon me. She was unchanged and unchangeable, but I——Ah, me! Let me not think of it. Let me kneel, as I used to kneel with my head in her lap when I was a boy, and when we were all in all to each other. Let me kneel and think of the long, long nights during which my mother used to work for bread for me; the trials, the disappointments, and the cheerful spirit bearing up through all, because a life that was dearer than her own was dependent upon her. The intervening years melted like a dream, and for a little while I was a boy again, and my heart was overflowing with tenderness for this dearest, best of women.

“I remember that night too, mother,” I said, raising my head from her lap; “I have been looking at it again. I lay awake

for a long time watching you ; you were singing softly to yourself, and did not know that I was awake."

My mother smiled, and sang, as softly now as then, and as sweetly, the very words she had sung on that night.

"You forget nothing, mother."

"Nothing that is so near to my heart, my dear. Nor would I have you forget, Chris, to whom it is we owe our release from the dreadful difficulties that once threatened to overwhelm us ; for I was getting very ill, you recollect, when your uncle's letter came to us, and I felt that my strength was failing me. We owe all to him, my dear ; wherever our home is he must share it. We must never leave him—never ; the mere contemplation of it, after all these years, makes me very unhappy."

Delicate as was the manner in which my mother had set my duty before me, she had made it quite clear to my mind ; but love and duty were at war with each other. All my visions of home-happiness were darkened

now by the shadow of uncle Bryan. Which-ever way I turned his image seemed to stand, barring my way to the realisation of my dearest hopes.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PREPARATIONS FOR AN IMPORTANT EVENT.

THE coldness between uncle Bryan and Jessie did not diminish with time. As a matter of necessity they were compelled to speak to each other occasionally, but they did so with coldness and reluctance, and a distinct avoidance of the subject which had broken the bond between them. I say that they were compelled to speak to each other as a matter of necessity, but I may be mistaken ; they may have spoken not out of consideration for themselves, but for my mother. Thinking over the matter since that time, I have understood how those two, if they had been alone, might have lived in the same house for years, and might have performed

their separate duties conscientiously, without a word passing between them. For the sake of peace Jessie would have yielded, but uncle Bryan would have remained implacable. Results proved this. In vain did my mother strive to bring them together in a more amiable spirit; in vain did she speak separately to each of the other's good qualities, magnifying their merits, ignoring their faults. Her labour upon uncle Bryan was entirely lost; but it was different with Jessie—not because she thought she was wrong, nor for uncle Bryan's sake, but out of her love for my mother.

“You are a child, my dear,” said my mother to her, “and he is an old man. If for that reason alone, you should yield.”

“It would be useless,” was Jessie's rejoinder; “I have known him for a much shorter time than you, but I know his nature better than you do. I judge of it by my own.”

“You do both him and yourself injustice, my dear,” pleaded the peacemaker; “if he

were all wrong and you were all right, it would be your duty to give in."

"Love and duty do not always go together," said Jessie obstinately.

"But we must make sacrifices, my child; what a miserable thing this life would be if some of us did not yield!"

"If I thought," said Jessie, softening, "that I should not be insulted I would do as you wish willingly, most willingly—not for my sake, but for yours."

"Try, then, for my sake."

"I will; and you will see what will come of it."

And Jessie tried, in her best manner and in good faith, with the result for which she was prepared.

"Can you not see now how it is?" she asked, with tears in her eyes. "I have brought trouble into this house. How much better would it have been for you if I had never entered it! But it wasn't my fault. Ah, if I were a man I wouldn't stop in it for another hour! But I have no friends;

and if it were not that I love to live, I might wish that I had never been born."

"Then you do not regard me as a friend, my dear child?"

But Jessie, with cruel determination, refused to respond to the tender appeal, and turned rebelliously away. All this I learnt from my mother, who hid nothing from me, and it did not tend to make me happier.

"Be patient, my darling," my mother said; "all will come right in the end."

"Did anything ever come right with uncle Bryan?" I fretfully asked. "Think of the story he told us! I remember too well what you said when I asked if you would have me look on things as he does. You said it would take all the sweetness out of my life; and you were right. He has taken the sweetness out of it already."

I did not consider that it was the very refinement of cruelty to bring her own words in judgment against herself. On such occasions she would tremble from sheer helplessness; but with unwearied patience she

would strengthen her soul, and strive, and strive, for ever with the same result. So wrapt was I in my own unhappiness, that it was only by fits and starts I gave a thought to hers; even that she was growing thinner and more sad, with this inward conflict of her affections, escaped me. Others saw it, but at that time the selfishness of my own grief made me blind.

But there were bright spots in my life during these days, even in the midst of these unhappy differences, in every one of which Jessie was the central figure. All that seemed to me worth living for was centred in Jessie; and she was never absent from my mind. She passed nearly the whole of her time with the Wests now—naturally enough, finding so little comfort at home—and as I was not happy out of her society, all my leisure was spent with her. This circumstance was introduced unpremeditatedly one evening when Jessie and I were preparing to go out. My mother, to tempt us to stop at home, had promised



some little delicacies for supper, and mentioned it incidentally, when Jessie said that she should not want any supper when she came home.

"I am sure to have supper with Josey West," she said.

"You go there a great deal, Jessie," remarked my mother, with an anxious look.

"I am happy there," was Jessie's terse reply; "but I don't want to take Chris away."

"You don't want the sunflower to turn to the sun," sneered uncle Bryan, with his usual amiability.

"I will not thank you for the compliment," said Jessie, "for it isn't meant for one. Chris," she exclaimed, turning suddenly to me, "is the sun the only bright thing in the heavens? Is not the moon as lovely, and are not the stars the loveliest of all?"

Uncle Bryan took up the theme, continuing it to her disadvantage.

"But one loses sight of these loveliest

things of all when the glare of the sun is in his eyes."

Jessie bit her lips.

"Am I to blame for going where my best friends are?" she asked.

"You go where your wishes take you. We are certainly not good enough for such a young lady as you."

"Perhaps not," said Jessie defiantly, as she left the room.

This was her custom, after all her attempts at conciliation had failed. Sometimes she would be silent; at others she would answer pithily and bitterly, and without thought, perhaps; but she always retired when she was becoming the subject of conversation. The old days of light skirmishing were at an end. Short and bitter battles of words, in which there was much gall, were now the fashion.

I was aware that for some time preparations were being made for an important evening at the Wests'. I was very curious about it, but Jessie would not allay my curiosity.

“You shall know all at the proper time,” she said; “in the meantime you can help me if you like.”

“Of course I will. What is that paper in your hand?”

“This is one of my characters, Chris. See here. Pauline—I’m to play Pauline. And here’s another—Mrs. Letitia Lullaby—that’s me again. I must learn every word of the parts, and you can help me in them.”

“I know what you want, Jessie; I’ve heard Turk go through some of his parts.”

Thus it fell to my lot to hear Jessie repeat from memory all that Pauline and Mrs. Letitia Lullaby have to say, giving her the cues, and correcting her until she was, as she said, “letter perfect.” But as she continued to tease me, and would not let me into the secret of all this preparation, I applied to Josey West for information. The good-natured creature seldom refused me anything.

“We are going to have a grand dress performance my dear,” she said, “and Jessie

will play the principal characters in two pieces."

"In dress?" I asked, in some amazement.

"In dress, my dear. The pieces are 'Delicate Ground,' and 'A Conjugal Lesson;' three characters in the first, and two in the second. Gus will play Mr. Simon Lullaby, Jessie's husband, in one piece, and Citizen Sangfroid, Jessie's husband, in the other. Brinsley, who is out of an engagement, has condescended—that is the word, my dear—condescended to play Alphonse de Grandier in 'Delicate Ground' for one night only, by special request of a lady."

"Jessie?" I said.

"She is the lady referred to; the part is far beneath him, of course—these parts always are, my dear, unless they are the principal parts—but he'll play it very well; I shouldn't wonder if he doesn't try to cut Gus out, so that we are sure to have some good acting. Between the pieces there will be some dancing by Sophy, and Florry, and Matty, and Rosy, and Nelly—it's good

practice for them—and as there's a change of performance at the Royal Columbia, Turk hopes to be able to get away in time to see the last piece, and to recite 'The Dream of Eugene Aram.' He wished very much to recite another piece, as he was sick of committing murders, he said; but he does Eugene Aram also by special request of a lady. He does it very finely too: one night at a benefit two ladies went into hysterics in the middle of it, and had to be carried out of the theatre. There was a paragraph in the *Era* about it, and it was put in some country papers as well. Turk is very proud of that; he often speaks of it as a triumph of art. I ought to play something as well, oughtn't I, my dear, on Jessie's night? But I shall have enough to do as acting-manager."

"Why do you call it Jessie's night?"

"Because it's the first time she ever dressed to act. Why, Turk has got some bills printed!—he's a good-natured fellow is Turk, the best in the whole bunch, my

dear! Here's one; but you mustn't say you've seen it. Jessie doesn't know anything about it yet." And Josey West produced a printed bill, which read as follows:

# THEATRE ROYAL, PARADISE ROW.

Lessee—Miss JOSEY WEST.

---

ENORMOUS ATTRACTION FOR THIS NIGHT ONLY.

---

FULL DRESS REHEARSAL,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF

MISS JESSIE TRIM,

Who will make her First Appearance on any stage,

Supported by those eminent Tragedians  
and Comedians,

MR. AUGUSTUS WEST AND MR. BRINSLEY WEST.

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On this occasion will be presented the Comic Drama of

## DELICATE GROUND.

Citizen Sangfroid ..... MR. AUGUSTUS WEST.

Alphonse de Grandier ..... MR. BRINSLEY WEST.

Pauline ..... MISS JESSIE TRIM.

*To be followed by a*

GRAND BALLET AND TERPSICHOEAN REVEL,

In which Mdles. SOPHY, FLORRY, MATTY, ROSY,  
and NELLY will appear.

*After which (by special request),*

The eminent Mr. TURK WEST (the Original Thug) will  
give his celebrated Recitation of

*THE DREAM OF EUGENE ARAM.*

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THE WHOLE TO CONCLUDE WITH THE COMEDIETTA  
ENTITLED

A CONJUGAL LESSON.

Mr. Simon Lullaby ..... MR. AUGUSTUS WEST.

Mrs. Simon Lullaby ..... MISS JESSIE TRIM.

Stage Manager, MR. AUGUSTUS WEST.

Acting Manager, MISS JOSEY WEST.

*Free List suspended, Press excepted.*

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In consequence of the great attraction, the entire Theatre has been converted into Stalls, the price of which will be One Guinea, or by special order, to be obtained of the Acting Manager. On this occasion babies in arms will be admitted, on the condition that their mothers accompany them, and that the baby-bottles are fully charged.

Josey West drew my particular attention to various parts of the programme, such as the price of the stalls. "In a fashionable theatre, my dear, such as this is," she said, with a whimsical look, "you can't make the stalls too high;" and the notice about babies in arms—"You know what a famous family we are for babies, my dear;" especially to the words, "Free list suspended, press excepted."

"But you don't expect the press," I said.

"Not exactly the press; but somebody of as much importance as a critic may honour us with his company. But never mind him just now. Isn't the programme splendid?"

It was Turk's idea, and he drew it up, and had it printed, and paid for it out of his own pocket. No one knows anything of it but you and me and him, so you must keep it quiet—we want to surprise Jessie with it when the night comes. Turk says that when Jessie is a famous actress this playbill will be a great curiosity."

"When Jessie becomes a famous actress!" I repeated, with a sinking heart.

"Yes, my dear; and she will be if she likes. Do you know, Chris, that if I were you—I really think if I were you"—and she paused, and looked at me kindly and shrewdly—"that I would buy two of the nicest bouquets I could find to throw to Jessie when she is called on at the end of the pieces. We'll manage between us, you and me, that no one shall see them until the proper moment; you buy them, and give them to me on the sly before the audience arrives, and I'll place them under your seat, so that no one shall know. And now, my dear, I want you to tell me something. If you don't



like to, don't; and if I am asking anything that I oughtn't to ask, all you've got to do is to tell me of it, and I'll drop it at once. Is Jessie comfortable at home? Ah, you hesitate and turn colour; if you speak, you'll stammer. Don't say a word; I'll drop the subject."

"No, why should you?" I said. "You are a good friend, and you have a reason for asking."

"I am as good a friend, my dear, to you and Jessie as you'll find in all your knockings about in the world. Mind that! Don't you forget it, or you'll hurt my feelings, as the Kinchin says. You've only got one better friend, and that's that dear mother of yours, that I'd like to throw my arms round the neck of this minute, and hug."

"Why, you've never spoken to her, Josey!"

"What of that? I've heard of her, and that's enough for Josey West. And a good mother makes a good son. I like you first for yourself, and I like you second for your mother (*not* out of a riddle-book, my dear,

though it sounds like it) ! As for my reasons, why, yes, I have my reasons for asking, or I shouldn't ask."

"Jessie does not make a confidant of any one but you, I suppose, Josey."

"Of no one but me, my dear ; and I know what I know, and suspect a great deal more."

"If Jessie confides in you, I may. She is not so happy at home as she might be and as she deserves to be."

"Thank you, my dear ; I only wanted to make sure. Now we'll drop the subject." She went through some comical pantomime, as though she were sewing up her lips. "Stop and see the girls go through their ballet. Come along, Sophy and Florry and all of you ; the bell has rung for the curtain." And she began to sing, first, however, whispering to me that we should have real music on *the* night. "No expense, my dear ; it's all ready to hand in the family."

Then the children arranged their figures and positions to Josey West's singing, and

rehearsed the ballet with the seriousness of grown-up people.

Neither uncle Bryan nor my mother knew anything of Jessie's passion for acting. Jessie held me to my promise of not saying anything about it at home ; and on occasions when I urged her to let my mother know of it, she refused in the most decided manner and said she had her reasons for keeping it a secret.

As for myself, I found myself in a labyrinth. So conflicting were the influences around me, that I scarcely dared to think of the plans I had cherished but a little while since, and hoped to see fulfilled. I could only hope and wait.

## CHAPTER XII.

### JESSIE'S TRIUMPH.

THE eventful evening arrived. It had been a difficult matter with me to keep the knowledge of the affair to myself, for I was in a state of great excitement, and my mother noticed it; but she did not seek my confidence except by kind looks of interest and curiosity. During the day, in accordance with Josey West's advice, I bought two handsome bouquets, which I conveyed to Josey secretly, and which she hid under my seat in the kitchen. Great pains had been taken with the room, which, with benches and chairs properly arranged, and the stage curtain, and a row of stage-lights with green shades to them, really presented the appear-

ance of a miniature theatre. It was rather gloomy, certainly, for all the candles were required for the stage, but that was a small matter. The room was filled chiefly by the West family, of whom every available member was present, down to the youngest baby in arms, and among the audience were a few persons with whom I was not acquainted, but whose appearance, with one exception, clearly denoted that they belonged to the dramatic profession. Two male and two female Wests, of tender age, comprised the band; the girls played the violin, and one of the boys played the flute, and the other the cornopean—which latter instrument ran short occasionally in the matter of wind. Everybody was very excited and very merry, and Josey West's queer little figure was continually darting before and behind the curtain.

“Would you like to see her?” the good-natured creature whispered to me. “Of course you would. Come along, then. She's dressed for Pauline.”

I went with Josey behind the scenes to Jessie's dressing-room, which had been built for the occasion with shop-shutters, and blankets, and odds and ends. Jessie looked wonderfully fascinating and beautiful in her fine dress, and a painful feeling of inferiority came upon me in the presence of so much grace and loveliness.

"And how do I look, Chris?" she asked, as she stood before me, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

I sighed as I told her that I had never seen any one look more lovely.

"*She'll* never want a wig, my dear!" said Josey West admiringly, as she ran her fingers through Jessie's beautiful hair. "Did you ever see such hair and such a complexion? All her own, my dear—scarcely a touch of the hare's foot. But, bless the boy! he looks as if he was sorry instead of pleased. That's not the way to make her act well. There! kiss her, and go back to your seat. The music's beginning."

My cheeks were as red as Jessie's as

Josey West pushed me towards Jessie, and turned her back ; but my arm was round Jessie's waist nevertheless, and Jessie, moved by a sudden impulse, kissed me very affectionately. It was the first time our lips had ever met.

“Done ?” cried Josey West. “There ! I’m sure you feel more comfortable now. Now run away, or I shall have you turned out of the house.”

In a very happy frame of mind I took my seat among the audience, whose enthusiasm was unbounded. The stage management was simply perfect : there was not a hitch in the entire performance. Directly the music ceased, amidst a general clapping of hands and stamping of feet—our satisfaction was so complete that we wanted everything done over again—a bell tinkled for the curtain, which was promptly drawn aside, and the comic drama of “*Delicate Ground*” commenced. General interest of course centred round Jessie, who at first was slightly nervous, but she grew more confident as the

scene progressed. To say that she played well is to say little ; her acting on that night is fixed in my mind as the most perfect and beautiful I have ever seen. It was not only my opinion, it was the opinion of all, and the applause that was bestowed upon her was astonishing in its genuineness and heartiness. "By heavens, sir!" I heard one of the visitors with whom I was not acquainted say to another—"By heavens, sir, she's peerless—peerless! She'll make a sensation when she comes out." There was an entire absence of envy in the praise that was given to her; and the women, as well as the men, were extravagantly enthusiastic in their demonstrations. I heard remarks also passed from one to another, to the effect that Gus and Brinsley never acted better in their lives; they certainly, after the fashion of Turk, "went in" with a will, and it was difficult to say which of them deserved the palm of victory. I liked Brinsley best, because he did not play the part of Jessie's husband, but this view I kept to myself. Had it not



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been for the kiss Jessie had given me, the memory of which made me triumphantly happy during the whole of the night, I might have been rendered uneasy by the passion which Gus West threw into the last lines of his part: "You *have* no rival. You have been, and are, sole mistress of this my heart. You have been, and will be, sole mistress of this my house." But even these words, and the passion with which they were spoken, did not disturb me, and when the curtain fell upon the scene, my only feeling was one of pride in Jessie's triumph. There were loud calls for Pauline; and Turk, who came in just as the curtain fell, joined vehemently in the applause, although he had seen nothing of the piece. He was accompanied by the old actor, whom I knew as Mac, and whose acquaintance I had made on the memorable night I spent at the Royal Columbia. When Jessie, led on by Gus and Brinsley West, came before the curtain and curtsied her acknowledgments, and when I threw my bouquet at her feet, the cheers.

were redoubled again and again ; and all acknowledged that there could not have been a greater success. Then there was a merry interval, which was occupied by gossip and refreshments ; and then the ballet and terpsichorean revel by Josey West's sisters, towards whom the audience were disposed to be more critical. The young misses acquitted themselves admirably, and were followed by Turk West, whose "Dream of Eugene Aram" was a most tremendous elocutionary effort. To me it was terribly grand, and the intense earnestness of Turk made a deep impression upon me. He was rewarded by unanimous cries of "Bravo, Turk !" "Well done, old fellow !" and a call before the curtain, which he acknowledged in his best manner. Jessie's appearance in "The Conjugal Lesson," as Mrs. Simon Lullaby, was, if possible, more successful than her Pauline ; but Turk, who found a seat next to me, was somewhat sarcastic on his brother Gus. Perhaps he was jealous too ; at all events, he whispered to me that he

wished *he* had had the opportunity of playing Mr. Simon Lullaby ; “then you would have seen a piece of acting, Chris, my boy, which you would not easily have forgotten.” It was late when the performances were over. Jessie was of course called on again, and received my second bouquet, and then the company prepared to depart. But Josey West cried out from behind the curtain that they were all to stop to supper, and in a short time these male and female Bohemians, the merriest and best-hearted crew in the world, were regaling themselves on bread-and-cheese and pickles and beer, amid such a din of joviality that you could scarcely hear your own words. I went behind to Jessie’s room, and waited until she was dressed ; Josey West heard me walking restlessly about, and called to me when Jessie was ready.

“And what do you think of us now,” she asked.

I did not stint my measure of admiration, and I told them what I had heard one of the

visitors say, that Jessie's acting was peerless—peerless.

“And so it was,” said Josey West. “Which one was it, my dear, who said that—a tall thin man, with a sandy moustache?”

“No; but he was sitting near, and I saw him nodding his head, and clapping, as though he was very pleased.”

“That's a good sign; he's a fine judge of acting. He'll want to be introduced to you, Jessie; so will they all. I shouldn't wonder——”

“What?” I asked.

“Nothing, my dear, unless you can make something out of the circumstance that that gentleman's name is Rackstraw, and that he prepares young ladies for the stage. That was a good thought of yours, my dear, bringing those bouquets. Such beautiful ones, too! I wish I had such a prince!”

Jessie laughingly bade Josey West hold her tongue, and I saw with delight that she had placed in her bosom a flower from one of the bouquets.

"It was very kind of you, Chris," said Jessie, giving me her hand, which was burning with excitement.

"You must be tired, Jessie."

"I could go all through it again," she replied.

"That's the way with us excitable creatures," observed Josey West, complacently; "we're like thoroughbred race-horses, we can go on till we drop. Now, Jessie, come along and be praised."

The praises she received were sufficient to turn any one's head; she was surrounded and kissed by all the women, and the men could not find words sufficiently strong to express their gratification. Mr. Rackstraw, the gentleman who prepared young ladies for the stage, was very eulogistic and very inquisitive, asking personal questions with a freedom which did not please me. But neither Josey West nor Jessie shared my feeling in this respect—Josey especially taking great interest in what he said.

“And you think she would succeed,” said Josey West.

“I am sure of it, Josey,” he answered.

He addressed all in the room by their Christian names, and was evidently regarded as a man of importance.

“But there is a great deal to be learnt?” asked Jessie; “is there not?”

“Yes, assuredly, my dear.” (Another sign of familiarity which displeased me. I did not mind it from the members of the West family; there was a homely and honest ring of affection in the term as they used it, but it sounded quite differently from Mr. Rackstraw’s lips.) “A great deal.”

“And it would cost money?”

“Well, yes,” he said promptly, “it would cost money—but not much, not much. Josey, I took the liberty of bringing a friend with me—Mr. Glover.”

Mr. Glover, the best-dressed man in the room, tall and dark, and between forty and fifty years of age, was the gentleman I had noticed who, alone among the audience, did

not appear to belong to the dramatic profession. I had not paid any attention to him during the evening, but upon this direct reference I turned towards him, and saw at a glance, in my closer observance of him, that his station in life was higher than ours. Being introduced to Jessie, he thanked her for a most pleasant evening.

"I am not a frequenter of theatres," he said, "but if you were upon the stage, I think I should be tempted to come very often to see you."

He spoke well and slowly, and with the manner of a person who was accustomed to reflect upon each word before it passed his lips. When he and his friend were gone, Josey West informed us that Mr. Rackstraw was a person of the greatest influence. Not only did he prepare young ladies for the stage, she said, but he was in connection with a theatrical agency, where important engagements were effected. Gus's name was down upon the books of this agency, and having in this way made Mr. Rackstraw's

personal acquaintance, he had induced him to come down and see Jessie act. Josey was in high spirits because everything had gone off so well.

“It is a real, complete, and splendid success,” she said, “and ought to be repeated every evening until further notice. Hark—old Mac’s going to speak!”

The old actor had risen, glass in hand, and had expressed his wish to address a few words to the company—an intimation which was received with vociferous and lengthened applause.

“Brothers and sisters in the noblest of all noble professions,” he said, “this reception is not only cheering, but, coming upon me when I am in the sere and yellow——” (Here there were cries of “No, no, old fellow; you’ve a good twenty years before you yet!”) —I use the language of those base and envious detractors, who say it is time the old actor was laid on the shelf. Using their words, then, which Avon’s Swan never thought would be so misapplied, this re-



ception coming upon me when I am in the sere and yellow, is not only cheering, but affecting. It recalls the memory of times when the humble individual before you never stepped upon the boards without one, and when old Mac's place—his proper and legitimate place in the ranks, won by the force of genius and hard study——” (Cries of “Bravo, Mac! Go it!”) —“I mean to—when his legitimate place, won, as I have said, by the force of hard study and genius, was not occupied by pretenders. But *tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis* ——” (The applause here lasted for full a minute) ——“O yes, old Mac can show these pretenders the way to go! *Tempora mutantur, et cetera*, my sons, and may you never find it out in the same way as the humble individual who stands before you has! But it was not to speak of myself that I rose—the old actor never cares to thrust himself forward” —(general and good-humoured laughter) —“knowing as he does that the subject is weary, stale, and unprofitable. He knows that he is but

‘a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more!’ But damme, my sons, the poor player is happy to know that in his old age he has honour, love, and, if not obedience, troops of friends.” (“So you have, old boy! Go on!”) “I intend to. I drink to you. Give me the cup. Nay, I have it”—(with a humorous look)—“not sparkling to the brim, but ’twill serve. ‘Let the kettle to the trumpet speak. The trumpet to the cannoneer without. The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth.’ Old Mac drinks to those he loves!” (As the speaker drained his glass, the youngster who played the cornopean performed a flourish upon the instrument, and the other members of the company did their best to produce an appropriate demonstration.) “But to the point. We have witnessed to-night a most remarkable performance by a young lady, who I am informed has never appeared upon the boards—a young lady who is destined to occupy a distinguished position—mark me, a distin-

guished position—and may old Mac live to see it! She has youth, she has grace, she has beauty, she has genius. In her presence I say it, my sons. The old actor knows a pretender when he sees him, and he knows genius when he sees it; he sees it here. In proposing the toast of this young lady's health" (Mac placed his glass upon the table and waited until it was refilled), "and in wishing her the success that always should, but sometimes doesn't, wait on merit, old Mac knows that he is performing a task which every one of you would like to have performed in his place. But damme, my sons, while old Mac lives, the old school of gallantry shall never die out."

How the toast was received, and with what enthusiasm it was drunk; how they all surrounded Jessie and petted her and complimented her; how she blushed and trembled at the praises which were showered upon her; and how these honours seemed to remove her farther and farther from me—I have not the power to describe. It was two o'clock

in the morning before the company broke up, and Jessie and I walked home. My heart was full almost to bursting, and I could not trust myself to speak. Not a word passed between us, but with Jessie's arm closely entwined in mine, and with her hand clasped in mine, I felt that without her I would not wish to live. When we reached home, I knocked softly at the street-door, but no answer came. I knocked more loudly, but still there was no answer. Surprised that my mother was not waiting up for us, I tried the handle of the door, and found that it was unlocked. I closed the street-door, and we entered the sitting-room, where a candle was burning. My mother was there, sitting by the table, with her head on her arm. I approached her in some alarm, and saw that she was asleep; her dreams must have been distressing ones, for she was sobbing bitterly.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MY MOTHER EXPRESSES HER FEARS CONCERNING JESSIE.

ONE evening, as I was smartening myself up in my room, preparatory to going to the Wests', my mother entered, and said, almost humbly,

“My dear, can you spare me a few minutes?”

“Certainly,” I replied. “Jessie is at the Wests', isn't she?”

“Yes, my dear. I'll not keep you long. I want to speak to you about her.”

“Go on, mother,” I said, in a tone of satisfaction, for that was the subject I loved best to converse upon.

“How you have grown, my darling !

You are the image of your father, who was a fine handsome man. How proud I am of my son !”

I looked in the glass, without any feeling of vanity. I always took pains with my appearance when I was about to present myself to Jessie, but I had no high opinion of myself, and I was never quite satisfied with the result.

“You do your best to spoil me, mother,” I said, submitting myself to my mother, whose fond fingers were about my neck. “Go on, about Jessie.”

“You are in her confidence, my dear ?”

The words were used in the form of a question ; and I was immediately conscious that they were the prelude to something of importance, for there was trouble in my mother’s face. I also was troubled ; a new sorrow had entered into my life, a sorrow with which of course Jessie was connected. All that there was for me of joy and pain in the world was associated with her.

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I hesitated in my answer. Jessie had pledged me to secrecy with reference to the peculiar nature of her intimacy with the Wests and to her passion for acting, and I would not betray her, even to my mother. There were confidences between Jessie and me which even she could not share. My mother and I had but few opportunities for conversation during this time, for very little of my time was spent at home. Wherever Jessie went I was bound to follow. It did not matter—except in the sorrow that it caused me—that she gave me less encouragement than formerly; it did not matter that certain indefinable signs from her, which I had hitherto treasured in my heart of hearts as proofs of her love, came rarely and more rarely; the rarer they were the more precious they were. I found excuses for her: in my own inferiority, which hourly and daily impressed itself more painfully upon me; in my being poor; in her being so beautiful and so far above me. I could not see, I dare not think, how it was to end;

but I followed her blindly, clung to her blindly.

My mother observed my hesitation, and divined the cause.

"Nay, my dear," she said, in a sad and gentle tone, "I do not ask you to tell me anything you think you ought to keep to yourself. I have not forfeited *your* confidence, have I, my darling?"

Before I could reply, she placed her hand to her heart, and uttered an exclamation of pain.

"Mother!" I cried.

"It is nothing, dear child," she said: "it is only a pain in my side that has come once or twice lately. Put your arms round my neck, my darling; it will pass away directly."

She rested her head upon my shoulder, and closed her eyes, holding me tightly to her.

"I am better now, dear child," she said, presently, with a sweet smile.

Could I see nothing in her face but physical pain? No, nothing. The old patient



look was there, the old tender love was there. What more *could* I have seen, had I not been blind?

"You ought to get advice, mother. Promise me."

"I will, my dear; but it is nothing. I am not growing younger, Chris."

"You were speaking of Jessie, mother."

"Yes, my dear. I was about to say that Jessie has no one to look after her but me."

"And me," I added, proudly.

"And you, my dear. I know what your feelings are towards her, but you are away at your work all the day, and then the duty devolves upon me alone."

"Well, mother?"

"Jessie is a little different to me from what she was; I am beginning to think—sorely against my will, dear child—that she mistrusts me. I know that she is not happy, but I could comfort her if she would let me. It might be better for all of us if she would confide in me."

"I am sure it would be, mother."

“She does not repulse me, Chris; she avoids me. When I have it in my mind to speak to her seriously, she seems to know what I am about to say—she is very bright and clever, my dear—and she obstinately refuses to listen; runs away, or turns me from my purpose by some means. I am very anxious about her.”

“Jessie can take care of herself,” I said, assuming an easiness I did not feel; “she is not happy at home, as we know; but we know, also, who is to blame for that. I suppose she refuses to listen to you because she feels that the subject you wish to speak to her upon is a painful one. I should do the same in her place.”

“I don’t blame her, my dear; don’t think that I blame her. But I must not forget my duty. She has no mother; do not I stand in that relation to her?”

I kissed my mother for these words.

“Then, knowing that I wish her nothing but good, why does she avoid me so steadily? O Chris, my child! greater unhap-

piness than all may come from her distrust of me."

A tremor ran through my frame. Not love alone, but pity, was expressed in my mother's face and tone.

"I don't quite understand you, mother," I said.

"Where does Jessie go to in the day, my dear?"

"Where does Jessie go to in the day!" I repeated. "Does she go anywhere?"

"Then you do not know, my dear; she hides it from you as well. For the last fortnight she has gone out every morning at eleven o'clock, and has not returned until four. I have put her dinner by for her every day, but she will not eat it, and she refuses to say where she has been."

I considered for a few moments, and soon arrived at a satisfactory conclusion.

"It is very simple. She goes to Miss West's, and she does not eat her dinner because she knows she is not welcome to it.

It is uncle Bryan's dinner, and this is uncle Bryan's house. Jessie is very proud."

My mother shook her head. "She does not go to Miss West's. I have not watched her, because I know that she would discover me, and that it would turn her more against me. But three mornings ago I saw her get into an omnibus which goes to the West-end. What friends can she have there, Chris? And if she has friends, should we not know who they are?"

"If she has friends!" I exclaimed, putting a brave face on the disclosure, although I was inexpressibly hurt at the knowledge that Jessie was keeping a secret from me. "Do you suspect she has?"

"She must have, Chris."

I looked at my mother; there was more in her tone than her words implied.

"Go on, mother. You have something more to tell me."

"It is best you should know, my darling," said my mother in a tone of inexpressible tenderness, encircling my waist with her

arm ; “ it is best you should know, for you are in Jessie’s confidence, and she will listen to you when she would not heed me. Yesterday afternoon, as I was walking home—I had been out on an errand for your uncle—a cab passed me, with two persons in it. One was a gentleman, the other was Jessie. Nay, my dear, don’t shrink. There is no harm in that ; the harm is in keeping it from us, her dearest friends, and in making a secret of it.”

I controlled my agitation, foolishly believing that I could deceive this fondest of mothers.

“ Did the cab come to our door ? ” I asked.

“ No, my dear ; it did not come down the street. It stopped a few yards in front of me, and the gentleman assisted Jessie out——”

“ Don’t hide anything from me, mother ; of course I shall speak to Jessie about it. Tell me exactly what you saw and heard.”

“ I heard nothing ; I shrank back, so that Jessie should not see me. The gentleman said something to her, but she shook her

head, and then he bade her good-bye and drove away. That is all."

It was enough to make me most unhappy, but still I strove to conceal my feelings. I endeavoured to make light of the circumstance, and I asked my mother in a careless tone whether she was sure it *was* a gentleman who accompanied Jessie. She said she was sure of it.

"What was he like?"

"Tall and dark, and very well dressed."

"Young?" I asked.

"No," she answered, and I could not help feeling relieved at the information; "nearer fifty than forty, I should say."

I could not at the moment call to mind any person whom the description fitted, and I promised my mother that I would speak to Jessie about it.

"Ask her to confide in me, my dear," my mother said.

"I will, mother."

As I walked towards the Wests', my mind was filled with what my mother had told me.

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I held the clue which would have led me to the truth, but I juggled with myself, and rejected it because the result was displeasing to me. I had never yet mustered sufficient courage to speak to Jessie plainly concerning her passion for acting, and what it was likely to lead to. Many and many a time had I thought of Josey West's words, "when Jessie becomes a famous actress," and of old Mac's remark that Jessie was destined to occupy a distinguished position on the boards. These utterances, coupled with the conversation that took place between Mr. Rackstraw and Jessie on the night of the performance, were surely sufficient to convince me that Jessie's visits to the West-end had something to do with her desire to become an actress; but I would not be convinced, simply because I did not wish to believe it. Say that Jessie did appear upon the public stage, and became famous—as I was sure she would become—she would be farther than ever from me. I caught at one little straw that lay in the way

of the result I dreaded. Mr. Rackstraw had said that there was a great deal to be learnt, and that it would cost money. Well, Jessie did not have any money. I magnified this straw into an insurmountable obstacle which it was impossible for Jessie to get over, and so I played the fool with my reason.

I found the Wests busy as usual. Jessie was there, learning some dancing steps from one of the young misses; she blushed as I entered, and the lesson was discontinued. I had intended to speak privately to Josey West about Jessie, but within a few minutes of my arrival, Gus West came in, and I had not the tact to make the opportunity. Josey informing Gus that Jessie had been taking a dancing lesson, he proposed that they should go through a minuet; and he and Jessie and two of the girls performed the old-fashioned dance most gracefully, Josey West humming the minuet de la cour, while I sat in the corner, the only serious person in the room. When the minuet was finished, Josey West



called me to her, and addressing me quietly as Mr. Glum, said she was afraid I was of a sulky disposition. I said I did not think I was sulky, but that I was very unhappy.

"About her?" questioned Josey, with a sharp look in the direction of Jessie; but before I could answer, Jessie came towards us, and said she was ready to go home.

"I did not wish to go," she said to me, on our way, "but I saw that you had something to say to me."

I answered, yes; that I did wish to speak to her.

"And about something unpleasant, I can see," she said; "make it as short as you can, Chris."

She was toying with a flower which Gus West had worn in his coat when he came in. I did not see him give it to her, but that she had it, and seemed to value it, was like a dagger in my heart.

"Jessie," I said disconsolately, "you know how I love you!"

"If any person on the stage," she answered,

with a slight tremulousness, "spoke of love in that tone, the whole house would laugh at him."

"That is the only thing that runs in your thoughts now," I said gloomily.

"What?" she exclaimed. "Love?"

"I meant the stage. You think of nothing but acting."

"Well—perhaps! What else have I to think of that brings any happiness to me?"

"I thought you loved me, Jessie."

"So I do, Chris," she said in a light fashion, still toying with the flower.

"And others, too," I added.

"Well, yes—if you please. There are always more than two persons in the world."

"Jessie!" I implored. "It hurts me to hear you speak in that careless way. I cannot believe that it is in your nature to think and speak so lightly of what is most precious."

"Why cannot you believe so?" she asked, somewhat more seriously. "Am I the only one who lightly regards a precious gift—am

I the only one who does not know the value of love?"

"I at least know the value of it, Jessie. Ah, you would believe me if you knew what I would do for you."

"I think you love me, Chris."

"With all my heart, Jessie; with all my soul!"

She trembled a little at the passion of my words.

"Tell me," she said, averting her head, "what would you do for me?"

I answered that there was no sacrifice I would not willingly, cheerfully make for her sake; that I thought of none but her, that I loved none but her; that if all the world were on one side, and she alone on the other, I would fly to her, and deem myself blessed to live only for her. This, and much more that has been said a myriad times before, and will be said a myriad times again, I said passionately and fervently. She listened in silence, and then, after a pause, told me she believed I had spoken the true

feelings of my heart, and that she was sure I had meant every word I had uttered. And then she pinned Gus West's flower to the bosom of her dress, and asked me if it did not look well there. Miserably, I answered Yes, and felt as though all the brightness were dying out of the world.

"But you have something else to say to me," Jessie presently remarked; "what you have already said is very pleasant to me. Now for the unpleasant thing."

The conversation with my mother, which in the heat of my declaration had slipped out of my mind, now recurred to me, and I told Jessie that my mother was very anxious about her.

"In what way?" she asked.

"Where do you go to every day, Jessie? Mother tells me that you go out regularly at eleven o'clock every morning, and that you do not return until four in the afternoon, and that you don't spend that time at the Wests'."

"Has she been watching me?"

"No, Jessie."

"Have you?"

"No," I replied, very hurt at the question; "you don't think I would play the spy upon you!"

"Oh, I don't know," she said, with a toss of her head; "persons do strange things when they are in love."

"You seem to know a great deal, Jessie."

She appeared to be both pleased and discontented at this remark.

"When girls get together, Chris, they *will* talk; and Josey West and I don't sit in the corner, mum-chance, with our mouths shut, as you sat to-night. Have you anything else to tell me?"

"Yes," I said, "and I wouldn't speak of it if I hadn't promised mother that I would do so. Yesterday she saw you riding in a cab with a gentleman."

"That is quite true," said Jessie simply; "but why didn't she speak to me about it?"

"Rather say, Jessie, why did you not

“speak to her. But mother is afraid that you mistrust her; she says that you avoid her when she has it in her mind to speak seriously to you.”

“She told you that?”

“Yes, Jessie?”

“She is not wrong, Chris,” said Jessie, with a sigh; “but we all seem to be playing at cross purposes, and not one of us seems to understand the other.”

“I think I understand you, Jessie.”

“Do you, Chris?” she asked, in a tenderer tone.

“If others mistrust you, I don’t. I know that everything you do is right.” She shook her head gently. “No, you shall not make me think otherwise, Jessie. You and I will stand together, come what will.”

“Against all the rest of the world,” she said, quoting my words.

“Yes, against all the rest of the world, Jessie,” I replied eagerly.

“It will never be, Chris; I would not accept such a service from you if the whole

happiness of my life depended upon it. Ah me! Often and often I think what an unhappy day that was for all of us when I came among you."

"You said so on the Sunday morning that you asked uncle Bryan to come to church with us; but you repented immediately afterwards, if you remember, and said you were not sorry, for if it had happened so, you would not have known mother."

"I have learnt something from her, Chris—something good, I hope."

"You could learn nothing from her that was not sweet and good," I said.

These last words were spoken on the threshold of our home.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### JESSIE MAKES AN EXPLANATION.

JESSIE walked straight into the parlour, where both uncle Bryan and my mother were sitting.

“You are anxious to know,” she said, addressing my mother, “where I go to of a morning.”

“Yes, my dear,” answered my mother.

I saw that uncle Bryan was listening, and I saw also by the expression in his face that the matter was new to him ; my mother had not complained to him of Jessie.

“Chris has been speaking to me about it,” said Jessie, “and I thought it best to tell you myself. I go to Mr. Rackstraw’s.”

“Who is he, my dear ?” asked my mother.



“He is a gentleman who teaches young ladies—I beg your pardon”—(with the slightest possible glance at uncle Bryan)—“young women how to act; he educates them for the stage.”

“But surely, my dear,” remonstrated my mother, “you have no intention of becoming an actress.”

“Why not? I am not wise, I know, and I am very wilful, and passionate, and unreasonable.” She resolutely moved a step from my mother, who was approaching her tenderly. “But I have sense enough to think of my future, and I do not see what I could do better. I have been acting for a long time at Miss West’s; we have often had little private performances there—Chris has seen them.” There was grief, but no reproach in my mother’s eyes, as she looked at me. “When I first commenced to act, I did it purely out of fun, and I had no serious intention of taking to the stage; but when I grew so unhappy here as to know that I was bringing discord among those who loved each other, and to whom I

was in a certain sense a stranger, and when day after day the feeling grew stronger that I was not welcome in this house, I thought of what was before me in the future. It must be very sweet, I think, to be dependent upon those who love you ; it is very bitter, I know, to be dependent upon those who hate you."

"Stop !" cried uncle Bryan, in an agitated tone. "I say nothing as to whether you are right or wrong in your construction of the feelings entertained towards you here. You are a woman in your ideas, although almost a child in years, and you have evidently settled with yourself that you will not be led——"

"Who is to lead me ?" said Jessie, pale and trembling. "I have asked to be led, and *you* know the result. Not quite out of hard-heartedness, but with some shadow of good feeling—though perhaps you will not give me credit for being capable of anything of the sort—I have asked to be shown what is right and what is wrong ; and if I, somewhat wilfully, preferred to be shown by

example and not by words, was I so very much to blame, after all?"

"You are clever enough," he said, "to twist things into the shape you like best——"

"No," she exclaimed, interrupting him again; "be just. You know what I refer to, and you know I have spoken exactly the truth. Do not say that I have misrepresented it."

"I beg your pardon," he said in a manly tone, and with a frankness which compelled admiration. "I was wrong. You have stated exactly the truth, and in a truthful way. But if you really wished to be taught, what better teacher could you have than the one before you?"—with a motion of his hand towards my mother—"if you had doubts, where could you find a better counsellor?"

"You are master," said Jessie, firmly and gently; "you gave me shelter and protection. Chris reminded me of that a little while ago when we were speaking of you, and I was angry with him for it—unreasonably

angry. It is not to be wondered at that I should look to you for counsel."

"If there were two roads before you," he said, "one, dark and bleak and bare"—he touched his breast—"the other, fair and bright and sweetened by most unselfish tenderness"—he laid his hand upon the hand of my mother—"which would you choose?"

"I cannot answer you; you are wiser than I am, but I do not think you can see my heart."

"I see," he said, with a glance at my mother's white face, "things which you do not seem to comprehend."

"The time may come," she retorted, "when you will be more just towards me, and I must wait until then."

"Well, well," he said, with a sigh; "you say it is bitter to be dependent upon those who hate you. Leave me out of the question. My sister loves you; Chris loves you. Can you not be content with this, and let me go my way?"

“No ; for I have been dependent upon you, not upon them.”

“Have I ever said a word which led you to believe I begrudged you shelter here ?”

“Never ; but we do not judge always by words.”

She seemed to have caught uncle Bryan’s talent for short crisp sentences, in which there was much truth.

“Go on with your explanation,” he said.

She turned to my mother.

“You saw me yesterday in a cab with a gentleman. His name is Mr. Glover, and he is a friend of Mr. Rackstraw. He offered to see me home, and wanted to come to the door with me, but I thought uncle Bryan would not approve of it.”

“I should not have approved of it,” said uncle Bryan, “and I do not approve of any person seeing you home in a clandestine way.”

“And, my dear child,” added my mother, “he is a stranger to us, and must be almost a stranger to you.”

"He is a gentleman," said Jessie.

"A gentleman!" repeated uncle Bryan scornfully.

"That is nothing against him. I like gentlemen. Mr. Rackstraw tells me that Mr. Glover can help me to get an engagement on the stage, and I must consider that. He treats me with the greatest respect."

"Who pays this Mr. Rackstraw," asked uncle Bryan, "for the lessons he gives you? His business is not entirely philanthropic, I presume, and he does not teach young ladies for nothing."

"Of course I have no money to pay him; I am to pay him by-and-by, out of any money I may earn."

"You are determined, then, to become an actress?"

"I am determined to get my own living, and I believe I shall do well on the stage. I cannot continue to live in a state of dependence. If I had a mother or a father, or if I were happy here, it would be different."

"I suppose you can be made happy," said

uncle Bryan, "by being indulged in all your whims and caprices, and by being allowed to act and think exactly as you please, without restraint."

"No," replied Jessie tearfully, "I only want kindness; I cannot live without it."

She turned to leave the room, with signs of agitation on her face, when uncle Bryan desired her to stay.

"There is something more," he said. "In the event of this gentleman—Mr. Glover—seeing you home again, he must not do so clandestinely. I owe a duty to you which I must perform, however distasteful it may be to you."

"It is not distasteful to me," she replied. "Mr. Glover would have seen me to the door yesterday but for my refusal to allow him. I am truly anxious to do what is right."

My uneasiness with respect to this discovery would have been unbearable but for a change in my circumstances which placed the day more at my own disposal. I had advanced steadily in my trade, and was by

this time a thoroughly good engraver. I think I brought into my work more than mere mechanical exactness, and some blocks of my engraving which went out of Mr. Eden's office attracted meritorious attention. I knew of men who were earning good wages—far higher than I was receiving—by taking work from master engravers, and executing it at home. Why could I not do the same? I should not then be so tied down as not to have an hour or two in the middle of the day to myself; and in the event of my availing myself of the opportunity, I could easily make up for lost time by working an hour or two later in the night. I mentioned this to Jessie, and said that then I could come to Mr. Rackstraw's, and bring her home of an afternoon—instead of Mr. Glover, I added.

“I would sooner,” said Jessie, “that you saw me home than Mr. Glover. I believe you are jealous of him, you foolish boy! You have no occasion to be.”

Such a crumb of comfort as this would console me for days.



“And then I shall be my own master,” I said to myself proudly.

My employer anticipated my wish ; he was a generous conscientious man, and I earned his respect. He called me into his office, and, almost in the exact words I have set down, proposed that I should do as I wished.

“You will not only be able to earn more money,” he said, “but in a few years you may be able yourself to set up as a master, and take apprentices of your own. I shall be able to give you plenty of work, and you will find that your time will be as fully occupied as you can desire it to be. Let me give you one piece of advice : never promise what you cannot perform ; if you say you will deliver a block at a certain time, keep your word, if you have to sit up all night to finish your work. Let it get to be known that you are a man whose word can be depended upon, and you are sure to be prosperous.”

I thanked him, and commenced almost immediately on the new system, with my

hands full of work. So behold me now, with my bed-room, in which there was a good light, fitted up with table and bench, working steadily at home, to my mother's great delight.

## CHAPTER XV.

### MR. GLOVER.

I soon made the acquaintance of Mr. Glover. In pursuance of my plans, I presented myself at Mr. Rackstraw's office every day at a certain hour, for the purpose of seeing Jessie home. I had of course previously consulted Jessie, and she had acquiesced in the arrangement. It was a serious encroachment upon my working hours, but I made up for it in the night, and between sunrise and sunrise I always performed a fair day's work. On the very first occasion of my presenting myself at Mr. Rackstraw's office, I found Mr. Glover there. Having sent in my name to Jessie, I waited in an outer room, the walls of which were lavishly decorated with paintings

and photographs of actors and actresses, in the proportion of about one of the former to twenty of the latter. As I was studying these, Jessie made her appearance, followed by Mr. Glover ; she was waving him off lightly, and saying as she entered,

“No, thank you ; I will not trouble you to-day. Chris has come to see me home.”

“Oh,” he answered, without casting a glance in my direction. “Chris has come to see you home ! Is Chris your brother ?”

“No,” she said, “I haven’t a brother or a sister in the world.”

He condescended to look at me after this, and held out his hand to me with smiling cordiality. I took it awkwardly, for I felt myself but a common person by his side.

“Chris and I must become better acquainted,” he said. “I remember now ; I saw this young gentleman at Miss West’s, on the night of your performance there. He threw you two bouquets.” Jessie nodded. “And very handsome bouquets they were,”

he continued ; “ he eclipsed us all by his gallantry ; but I had no idea I was to have the pleasure that night of making your acquaintance, Jessie, or I might have entered the field against him. Any friend of yours *must* be a friend of mine.”

Then he bade us both good-day, without any attempt to press his attentions upon Jessie. Jessie asked me what I thought of him, and I could not help answering that he seemed to be a gentleman, but made some demur to his addressing her by her Christian name.

“ Oh, that is the fashion in the profession,” said Jessie carelessly ; “ there is nothing in that.”

“ He is not an actor, is he, Jessie ? ”

“ No ; he is something in the City.”

This vague definition of many a man’s occupation, common as it is, was new to me, and I inquired what the “ something ” was. Jessie could not enlighten me. I continued my inquiries by asking her how she knew that he was something in the City. He

himself had told her, Mr. Rackstraw had told her, and young ladies whose acquaintance she had made at Mr. Rackstraw's had also told her.

"He is at Mr. Rackstraw's every day, Jessie?" I said.

"Nearly every day, Chris," she answered, and closed the subject of conversation by saying that, at all events, Mr. Glover was a perfect gentleman.

I did not find him to be otherwise; he was uniformly courteous to me, and I could not make open complaint against him because his courtesy was of a kind which a superior yields to an inferior. He was a gentleman, and I was a common workman; I chafed at it inwardly, nevertheless. I would have avoided him if I could, but he would not allow me to do so. The second time I walked into Mr. Rackstraw's office I met him at the door, and he fastened on to me I had come for Jessie? Yes. Was I coming every day for Jessie? Yes. I had plenty of spare time then? Yes. I was fond of

Jessie, he supposed? I answered as briefly as was consistent with bare civility, but I made no reply to his last question. He was neither surprised nor exacting. As I did not answer the question, he answered it himself. It was natural that I should be fond of her; we had been brought up together as brother and sister, he had been given to understand; yes, it was natural that I should be fond of her in that way—natural, indeed, that we should be fond of each other in that way. He had been given to understand, also, that we were not in any way related to one another; but he could see that in an instant, without being told. Jessie was a lady, evidently; I might tell her he said that, if I pleased, for he was never ashamed of what he said or did; Jessie was a lady in her manners, in her speech, in her ideas; and these things do not come to one by instinct, or even by education; they must be born in one.

This and much more he said; conveying by implication (what indeed I knew already)

that Jessie was far above me, and (what I could not doubt) that he was a gentleman, and I was not. He had a trick of playing with his moustaches, which he continually curled into his mouth with his fingers as he spoke ; and even at that early period of our acquaintanceship, I, in my instinctive dislike of him, thought there was something stealthy in the action. Standing before me, with his fingers to his mouth, Mr. Glover there and then commenced to expatiate upon a theme of which I heard a great deal afterwards from his lips : this theme was his good name, of which he was evidently very proud. There was not a stain upon it, nor upon that of any of his connections ; he had never harboured a thought to tarnish his character, which was above reproach. He did not express these sentiments in the words I have used, but these were the pith of them, and there was a distinct assertion in his utterances that he was much better than his fellow-creatures. I, listening to him, understood exactly what he meant to convey to my com-



prehension : that even if we twain had been equal in station, his high character and stainless name would have placed him far above me.

In a week from this time Jessie told me that Mr. Glover had made closer inquiries about me, and hearing that I was a wood engraver, had expressed his intention of interesting himself in my career. I was not pleased at this ; I did not wish to be placed under an obligation to Mr. Glover, and I muttered something to this effect to Jessie. She seemed surprised, but made no comment upon it. Mr. Glover, however, was as good as his word. I received a letter from a master engraver, desiring me to call upon him, with reference to some work he wished to give me. The hour fixed for the appointment was the hour at which I was due at Mr. Rackstraw's. I had no choice but to comply ; and I made arrangements that afternoon, not only to engrave some blocks of a superior description, but to submit sketches of my own, upon wood, for

a Christmas story which was to be published that year. The interview was a long one, and when I arrived home, I was not pleased to find Mr. Glover chatting to my mother in our sitting-room. He had seen Jessie home, and, in compliance with uncle Bryan's desire, had brought her to the door. An introduction to uncle Bryan and my mother naturally followed, and thus he was introduced to the house. He asked me pleasantly whether I had made satisfactory arrangements, and confessed that he had been the means of introducing this better kind of work to me. He received my mother's thanks graciously, and it made me mad to see that she thought it was a stroke of great good fortune to have won such a patron. What could I do but thank him also for the introduction? That I did so in an ungracious and even in a sullen manner did not seem to strike him; Jessie noticed it, however.

"You don't seem pleased, Chris," she said, following me out of the room.

"I don't know what my feelings are," I

replied ; “from any other hands than his the work that I have received to-day would have delighted me beyond measure. But I had better not speak ; it will be best for me to hold my tongue.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because I seem never to dare to say what I think ; and I don’t like to play the hypocrite.”

“ You don’t say what you think,” Jessie said, “ because you are conscious that your thoughts are unjust.”

“ Perhaps it is so ; but I can’t make myself believe that they are.”

“ You haven’t a good opinion of Mr. Glover.”

“ I am not grateful for his patronage ; I don’t mind saying that.”

It would have been more truthful in me to have said that the instinctive aversion with which he had at first inspired me was fast changing to a feeling of hatred. I hated him for his smooth manner, and hated him the more for it because it was impossible to

find fault with it ; I hated him for his civility to me, and hated him the more because he refused to notice that my manner towards him, if not the words I used, plainly showed that I did not desire his friendship or patronage. But I could have multiplied my reasons, which might have all been summed up in one cause of dislike—his attentions to Jessie.

“Don’t come to the Wests’ for me to-night, Chris,” Jessie said, after a little quiet pondering.

“Why not, Jessie ?” I asked, with a sinking heart.

“Because I don’t want to be made more unhappy than I am already. Besides, you must devote your attention more to your work, and less to me. I am not the most important thing in the world to you.”

“You are,” I said, gloomily ; “how often have I told you so ! You don’t believe what I have said, then !” I turned from her in sorrowful passion.

“Chris, Chris,” she said, “I am not, I must

not be, your only consideration. You have other duties before you, and you must not forget them or neglect them, as you have hitherto done."

I thought she referred to my work, and I answered that I did not neglect it, and that I could perform great things if she were kinder to me.

"And am I not kind to you?" she exclaimed. "Is it my fault that you are so wrapt up in your own feelings that you are regardless of the feelings of others? If you are blind, I am not. If you are selfish, I am not. If you forget your duty, I shall not forget mine."

These were the unkindest words she had ever spoken to me, and they were a terrible torture to me.

"Do I show myself to be blind and selfish," I said, "and do I forget my duty in loving you as you know I love you, and in wishing to be where you are?" She did not reply. "But perhaps," I added, bitterly, "you have another reason for

not wishing me to come to the Wests' to-night."

"What other reason?" she asked, quietly.

"Perhaps Mr. Glover is to be there." The next moment I would have made any sacrifice to have recalled what I had said. But it was too late. How often do we plunge daggers into our hearts by inconsiderate words, rashly spoken, as these were!

Jessie looked at me swiftly, with a fire in her eyes which I had never seen there before, and with hot blood in her face; but in another moment she was as white as death.

"Jessie!" I cried, repentantly, seizing her hand.

She tore it from me indignantly.

"I will ask him to come!" she said, and left me, ready to kill myself for my cruel injustice.

That night I watched outside the house of the Wests', and made false the words I had spoken to Jessie but a short time since, when I asked her if she thought I would play the spy upon her. I was careful that she should

not see me, for, if she did, I felt that I should never have been forgiven. If I proved my words false, Jessie proved hers true. Mr. Glover was at the Wests', and walked home with her. I waited until she was in the house, and then I followed Mr. Glover at a distance. I had no distinct intention in my mind; I simply felt that I *must* follow him; he seemed to draw me after him. I have no doubt that, if a clear meaning could have been evolved from my whirling thoughts, and had been shown to me, I should have been shocked at it. He walked for a couple of miles, and then hailed a cab; after that I wandered about miserably, without thinking where I was walking, without thinking of the time. It was only when I found myself on a bridge six miles from Paradise Row, and heard the hour strike, that I awoke to consciousness, as it were, and walked slowly home. The faithful mother was sitting up for me.

“My darling child,” she said, with a sob of grief at the misery she saw in my face,

“where have you been? What has kept you out so late?”

I put her from me in silence, and went into my room, and locked the door. As I did so, I thought I heard the door of my mother's bed-room above open and close. But I dismissed the fancy, and went to bed with a heavy heart.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### TURK WEST'S APPEARANCE AT THE WEST-END THEATRE, AND ITS RESULTS.

EARLY in the morning I watched for an opportunity to endeavour to make peace with Jessie. My mother had been in great anxiety about me during the night, and had come down to my bed-room three or four times, whispering my name at the door; but I pretended to be asleep, and as the door was locked, she could not enter the room. I passed a sleepless night, and tossed about in bed, longing for daylight. When it came, I rose and commenced to work, and even in the midst of my great unhappiness I found comfort in it, for I loved it. At seven o'clock I heard my mother calling to me, and I opened my door.

“At work so soon, my dear!” she said, in a tone of exquisite tenderness.

I answered that I had a great deal of work in hand, and that it would not do for me to be idle. She sat by my side, and was saying meekly that her boy must not work too hard, but must take proper rest, when she broke down. Looking at her, I saw an expression of such yearning devotion in her pale face, such sweet and wistful love, that, softened for a moment, I laid my head on her shoulder, and sobbed quietly. Her tears flowed with mine.

“If I could help you, dear child!” she murmured.

“You cannot—you cannot,” I murmured in reply. “Mother, Jessie must not go out this morning without my seeing her. I *must* speak to her alone.”

Soon after breakfast, when uncle Bryan was in the shop, I heard her tell Jessie to wait in the parlour for a minute or two, and then I knew that Jessie was alone. I immediately opened my door, which led into the parlour,

and stepped to Jessie's side. She did not look at me.

"I have come to ask you to forgive me," I said.

"What have I to forgive?" she asked.

"You know," I answered. "What I said yesterday about Mr. Glover. I did not mean it, Jessie; I spoke in passion. It was cruel of me. Say that you forgive me, Jessie."

"It was unjust as well as cruel," she said; "but I am not the only person you are cruel to. Do you know what time your mother came to bed this morning?"

"It was very late," I said remorsefully.

"Have you any idea what she suffered while she waited up for you, Chris? Because you and I have quarrelled, is that a reason why you should be cruel to her?"

"I have been doubly wrong," I said, "but I have made my peace with her."

"Yes, that is easy with such a nature as hers; mine is harder."

"Still you forgive me; say that you forgive me, Jessie."

“Yes, I forgive you,” she said coldly; “not because you were unkind to me, for I deserve that, perhaps, but because you were unjust to me.”

I could extract nothing more than this from her, and I was fain to be satisfied. But I saw clearly enough that she was less cordial towards me than heretofore. The spirit that animated and sweetened our intercourse in the dear old days seemed to have fled, never to return. But I had something in my mind which, when carried out, might, I thought, be the means of re-establishing myself in Jessie's favour. Her birthday was approaching; in a fortnight she would be eighteen years of age. From the day on which Jessie had given me, as a birthday present, the silver locket, with the words engraven on it, “To Chris, with Jessie's love,” I had had many anxious consultations with myself as to what kind of gift I should give her on her birthday, and I had resolved that a gold Geneva watch and chain would be appropriate and accept-

able. I had seen the very thing I wanted in a jeweller's shop, and the price asked for the pretty ornament—seven pounds—was not beyond my means, for I had been saving money for some time, and was now earning more than two pounds a week. On the very day on which Jessie and I made up our quarrel, I went to the jeweller's and purchased the birthday gift, and gave instructions that on the inside of the case should be engraven, "From Chris to Jessie, on her eighteenth birthday. With undying love." In my state of mind nothing less fervent would satisfy me. Being attracted by a plain ivory brooch, in the form of a true lover's knot, I purchased that also, and felt, as I did so, that that would complete our reconciliation. As I sat at my work after the transaction of this business, I thought of what had passed between me and Jessie when she gave me the silver locket, and I reproached myself very strongly for having uttered a word to give her pain. Was not the inscription, "To Chris, with Jessie's love,"

sufficient? I decided that it was, and I resolutely refused to harbour the words of Mr. Glover which came to my mind, to the effect that Jessie and I had been brought up as brother and sister, and that it was natural we should be fond of each other in that way. How, thought I, could I ever have been so mad as to entertain a doubt of Jessie? She was better than I, cleverer than I, and she saw faults in me which she wished to correct, and she was also naturally hurt at my suspicions of her. Well, I would never again suspect her; from this moment I would have the fullest faith in her goodness, her purity, her love. It was in this mood that I presented myself at Mr. Rackstraw's office, somewhat doubtful of the manner in which Jessie would receive me, but resolved to show her in every possible way how truly I loved her and what faith I had in her. Mr. Glover was there of course, and we all three walked together from the office. That I abased myself before him is true, and it is quite as true, notwithstanding the resolution

I had formed, that I despised myself for so doing. Jessie looked at me thoughtfully, and seemed to be considering within herself whether she approved of my new mood. For this reason Mr. Glover found her a somewhat inattentive listener to his confidential utterances, the intervals between which he improved by talking to and at me on his pet theme—his character and good name. Before we had walked a mile, Jessie proposed that she and I should take an omnibus home, as she was tired, and Mr. Glover left us. On our way she told me that Mr. Rackstraw had offered her an engagement on the stage. Did she intend to accept it? I asked; and she said that she had deferred her answer until after her birthday.

“I wish with all my heart,” I said, “that you were not going on the stage; not that there is any harm in it, Jessie, nor that there could be harm in anything you do, but because it seems as if it will take you away from us.”

“Do you think,” was the reply, “that a

woman has not an ambition as well as a man? If I have a talent—and I really think I have, Chris—why should I not turn it to good account? Besides, I have my plans. I owe money, Chris.”

“To Mr. Rackstraw for your lessons. Well, I can pay that, Jessie. All that I have is yours, and you don’t know how rich I am growing.”

“You are too good to me, Chris,” she said, giving me her hand, which I took and held close in mine beneath her mantle; in that moment all my trouble vanished, and a feeling of ineffable delight brought peace to my heart once more. “Will nothing cure you?”

“Nothing will ever cure me of loving you,” I said, in a glad whisper. “You would not wish that.”

She turned the subject.

“I owe other money as well. I owe a great deal to uncle Bryan; he is poor, and I should like to pay him. But we’ll not talk of this any more just now, Chris; wait till my birthday comes.”



"You will have a secret to tell me then, Jessie."

"Yes; I have thought a great deal lately of the letter I am to read for the first time on that day."

"And you have never had the curiosity to open it, Jessie?"

"Oh yes, I have; but I have never read it. I can be steadfast and faithful, Chris, as well as other people. Let us call in together and see Josey West."

"Ah," said that little woman, with a shrewd glance at us as we entered, "so you two lovers have been making it up?"

"Don't be foolish, Josey," exclaimed Jessie.

"How do you know we ever quarrelled?" I asked, in high spirits.

"How do I know that it will be night to-night, you meant to ask. Because I'm crooked, you think I can't see things perhaps. Have you seen Turk?"

"No," I answered.

"He has gone to your house to tell you

something. I dare say he is waiting there for you. Here is a rose for you."

I took and dropped it.

"Ah," said the queer little creature, "because a rose is pretty and fresh, and smells sweet, you think it can't prick you! There, get along with you, Mr. Wiseacre, and mind how you handle your roses for the future."

Turk had great news to communicate. His chance had come. By a fortunate combination of circumstances, an opening had occurred in a West-end theatre, and he was to make his first appearance there on the ensuing Saturday night in the new play that had been written for him.

"It's a fluke, Chris, my boy, a fluke," he said, walking up and down the room excitedly; "a sensation piece that the lessee thought would be a great draw is a most complete failure, as it deserves to be. He must either fill his house with paper or play to empty benches, so he withdraws his sensation piece, and gives me a show. We

come out without much of a flourish ; but we shall astonish them, Chris, my boy. The simple announcement of a new play and a new actor at that theatre is sufficient to draw all the critics, and we shall have a great house and a great triumph. You shall come, Chris, my boy ; you shall come to witness the effect I shall produce. You shall go into the pit ; here is an order for you. I don't ask you to take a big stick with you—I scorn to solicit undeserved applause ; but at the same time every friend is a friend, and what's the use of a friend if he isn't friendly, eh, Chris, my boy ?—a word to the wise ; you understand ; there's no need of anything more betwixt *us*. The piece will be wretchedly put upon the stage ; there will be no scenery to speak of ; the stock actors who play the other parts will be—well, no better than they should be, Chris, my boy, and, in addition, they will not be disposed to regard with favour a man who is an actor, Chris, my boy, and who comes to break down vicious monopolies and vicious systems. But what matter these small draw-

backs to Turk West? They daunt not him! Resolved to conquer, he goes in and wins. Turk's sun will rise on Saturday night, Chris, my boy, and ever after it will blaze—that's the word, sir, Chris, my boy—blaze refulgent, and all the lesser suns shall pale before it."

"But if you should fail," I suggested.

He glared at me in incredulous astonishment.

"There is no such word in Turk's vocabulary, Chris, my boy. The man who goes in with an idea that he will fail generally does fail, and deserves to fail. Is there any want of pluck in Turk West? Is there any want of stamina in him? No, no. It's no game of chance that he plays. On Saturday night next he throws double sixes. And after that he'll be able to serve his friends."

Did his family know of it? I asked.

"Yes, they know of it," he replied, "and those who can come will be there—in different parts of the theatre, Chris, my boy, strangers to each other. And old Mac will be there, with an oak stick; it's an off night with him.

Here are a couple more orders which you may like to give to *friends*," with most significant emphasis on the last word.

I fully understood his meaning, and I gave the orders to persons who promised to applaud Turk on every available opportunity, and who, I have good reason for believing, basely betrayed their trust ; but there are not more ungrateful persons in the world than those who go to a theatre without paying. The receipt of an order has a baleful effect upon them ; it deadens their sense of enjoyment, and makes them miserably hypercritical. On the following Saturday I made my way to the West-end theatre in a state of great expectation and excitement. Meeting with a man in the street who sold walking-sticks, I purchased the stoutest in his collection, and, thus armed, seated myself in front of the pit, half an hour before the curtain rose. The theatre was quite filled before the performances commenced, and a fashionable company was assembled in the stalls and private boxes. I recognised several members of Turk West's

family in different parts of the house, who stared at me stolidly, and made no response to my familiar nods. Debating with myself upon the reason of this, I came to the conclusion that they had resolved not to know any person on that night lest they might be set down as partisans of Turk, and thus tarnish the genuineness of his triumph. The conclusion was strengthened by the circumstance which I noted, that they seemed to be perfectly oblivious of each other's existence; but there was certainly a family likeness in the sticks they carried. Studying the playbill, I found that a piece of some importance would be played first, and that Turk would not make his appearance until past nine o'clock. I paid but little attention to the drama in which Turk was not; my stick was as indifferent as myself; and the other sticks witnessed this part of the performance in mute inglorious ease; nevertheless there was a good deal of applause when the curtain fell. About this time there straggled into the

stalls and private boxes certain persons whom a communicative stranger who sat next to me, and who appeared to be a wonderful authority on all matters connected with the drama, pointed out as notabilities.

The critics were the most interesting persons in my eyes, and I stared at them with interest, and with some feeling of disappointment because they were so like ordinary mortals. I asked my neighbour what he thought of Mr. Turk West as an actor—when I mentioned the name of my friend, I consulted my playbill with the air of one to whom he was a stranger—and I learnt to my mortification that he had never heard of him. He did not seem to be very sanguine of the success of the new play or the new actor, and I was mean enough to agree with him. The title of the play was “Twice Wedded, or Torn Asunder;” and in due time the curtain rose for its introduction to the audience. I cannot undertake to describe it, for the reasons that a good deal of it was not heard, that the

actors and actresses were imperfect in their parts, and that the story was so involved and mysterious as to baffle description. The heroine, it appeared, had been twice married—once, many years ago to Turk, who had been torn from his wife, for no assignable reason, on the wedding-day, and who was supposed to have died in battle (what battle, and why he went to battle, were not explained), and afterwards to a person whose identity I was not successful in discovering. Turk played two characters, an Irish servant and the first husband, who instead of dying in battle, as he should have done, had been confined in a madhouse, from which he had just made his escape. After a comic scene as the Irish servant, which was mildly tolerated by the audience, Turk came on in a high-peaked hat, a long cloak, and hessian boots; and hearing that his wife had married again, behaved in so mad a manner as to fully justify his long incarceration. Being a very short man, Turk's appearance in this costume was even in my eyes most ludicrous; no



effort of imagination could have made a hero of him, and as (for the sake of contrast, I suppose, with his other character) he spoke in the most lugubrious tone, the audience went through various transitions of feeling. First, they were, as I have said, mildly tolerant; then they became impatient, then indignant, and then, there was something so really comic in the little man's despair, they hooted and laughed at him. Directly the feeling of derision came into play, even I knew that both Turk and his new and original drama were, in dramatic parlance, "damned." An unfortunate word which Turk used was taken up as a catch-word by the audience, and they flung it at him with merciless enjoyment. They literally screamed with laughter when he was most serious, and even the critics threw themselves back in their seats and showed by their merriment (for critics are rarely merry) that they were tasting a new sensation. In vain the sticks rapped approval; in vain did Turk's friends endeavour to stem the

current. The knowing man who sat next to me declared, as he wiped his eyes, that he would not have missed this first night for anything. "It's the richest thing I've ever seen," he said; and, like a coward as I was, I flung away Turk's colours, and basely murmured that it was the richest thing *I* had ever seen. I was very sorry for poor Turk, and more so because he was so brave all through. He did not exhibit the slightest sign of discomposure at this miscarriage of his ambition, but faithfully spoke every word of his part, until the curtain finally fell amidst peals of laughter; and then the stage-manager came forward and stated that the new drama would *not* be played again.

When I was out of the theatre, I was almost inclined to run away, for I felt that the verdict was a just one, and I was afraid that Turk might wish me to declare otherwise; but I liked him too well to desert him. I waited for him near the stage door, and so did a few other of his friends, who seemed to regard their big sticks, as I did mine,

with gloomy disgust. Turk soon made his appearance, and, to my surprise, with a cheerful countenance. Not a word was said about his failure. We adjourned to a neighbouring tap, and talked of anything but the drama. Old Mac was there, enjoying his toddy, but he did not at first join in the conversation. Turk, also, was silent. Suddenly Old Mac burst out :

“Hang it, my sons, let’s speak ! Turk, you acted bravely. I was never prouder of my profession than I was to-night, when I saw you go manfully and artistically through your part, in defiance of the senseless howlings of the envious crew. If I could have broken all their heads with one blow of my stick—did you hear it going, Turk ? I stuck to you, my son ; I stuck to you like a man—I’d have done it ! Damme, I’d have done it, to see where the brains were. I’d have made a quarry with thousands of these quartered slaves as high as I could pick my lance ! Thank you ; I will. Another glass of whisky-toddy, miss—as before. As be-

fore!" Here old Mac drew the back of his left hand across his eyes, and holding out his right sympathisingly, said: "Turk, my boy, drown dull care! A small piece of lemon, if you please, miss. Here's confusion to the rabble!"

"Now what's the use of beating about the bush?" demanded Turk, a little huskily. "I'm not such an ass as not to see that I've made a failure. Is Turk West going to bury his head in the sand, like an ostrich, and refuse to see it? Not he! Well, I'm not the first, and sha'n't be the last. Pass me the pewter, Chris. It served me right. I ought to have taken more time; I ought to have gone on by degrees; I ought to have stuck to my last. I've had my lesson, and I mean to profit by it. Mac, old boy, you and I will never meet again at Philippi. I've had my dream, and it's over."

"The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces!" murmured old Mac.

"It was all the fault of the piece," said

one. "What audience could be expected to stand such a hash?"

"It wasn't all the fault of the piece," retorted Turk manfully. "We were both to blame. It isn't a first-rate piece. I can see that now; but there's merit in it, merit, my boy, although the subject is an unfortunate one. I've brought desolation upon more than one breast to-night." He beat his own, and the action would have been ludicrous, but for the genuine tone in which he spoke. "The author had set his all upon the hazard of the die, and I saw him rush from the side-wings, with the salt tears running down his face. What did I say I'd throw to-night, Chris, my boy? Double sixes? Well, I threw for both, and threw double blank. A nice bungler I am! My mind's made up. Othello's occupation's gone! Turk West acts no more."

"Nonsense, old fellow, nonsense!" his friends remonstrated. "You'll think better of it."

“I’ve said it,” cried Turk, with stern resolve. “I act no more.”

“In that case,” said old Mac, in a tone of gloomy desperation, “I’ll take another glass of whisky-toddy. Little does the English stage know what it has lost this night!”

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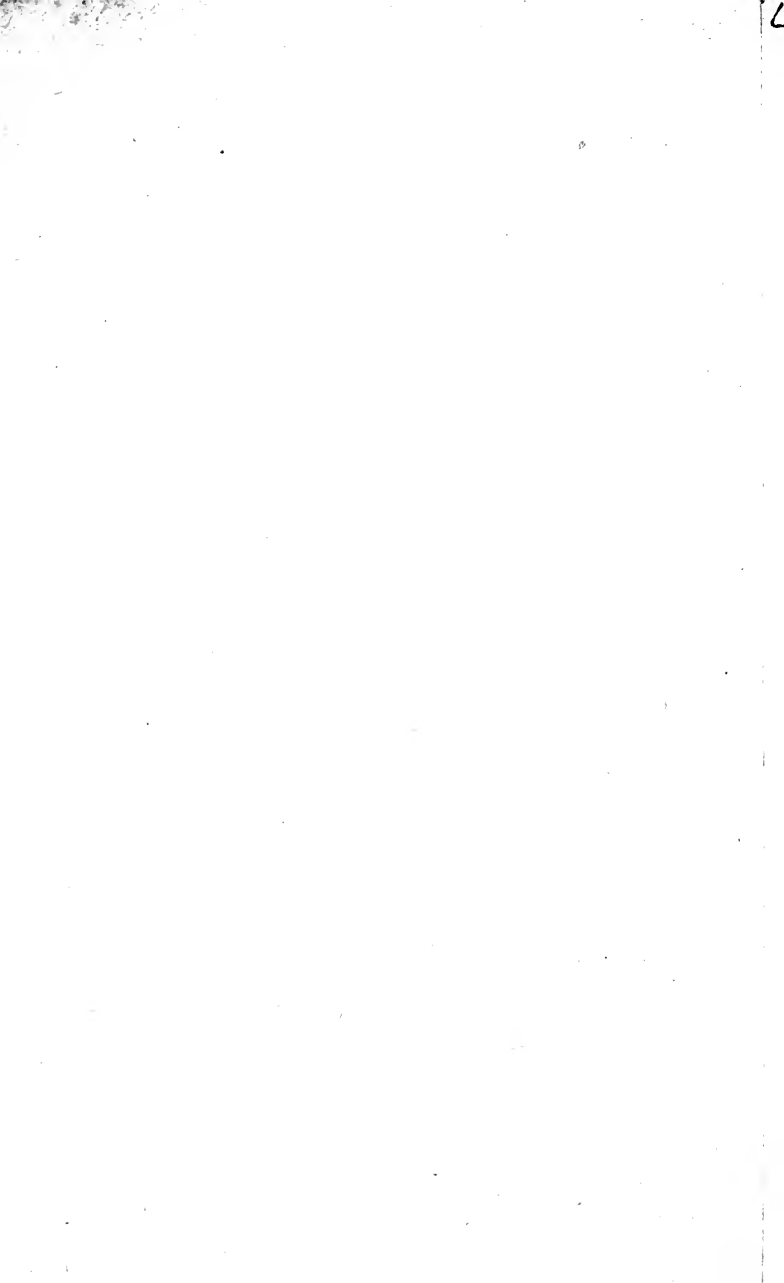
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